

MICROWAVE MINUTES

By **JOYCE BATTCHER**

I love salads, especially at this time of year. And I love homemade dressings. Bacon Sweet-Sour Dressing is one of my favorites because it can be used in just about any kind of salad. Its bacon-rich flavor is lightened with a sweet and sour accent. It cooks in your microwave in minutes with no trouble at all.

Try it poured over finely sliced cabbage or microwave-baked potato slices. Try it in chicken or pasta salad. Or pour hot dressing over tender leaf lettuce to make a wonderful old-fashioned wilted lettuce salad.

If you like a rich bacon flavor and don't mind additional saturated fat and sodium, make it the traditional way (which I call Dressing No. 1, below). Dice the raw bacon and cook it with onion in a microwavable bowl. Cover the bowl with a paper towel to prevent spattering. Add remaining ingredients and cook about two minutes.

The newer method (used in Dressing No. 2, below) takes two cooking dishes and is a little more work, but is the healthier of the two. Because bland vegetable oil is used instead of the flavorful bacon drippings, thyme and garlic powder are added.

Dressing No. 2 looks better after it chills, so it's best for cold salads. The bacon drippings in Dressing No. 1 harden on vegetables or other salad ingredients, while the vegetable oil used in Dressing No. 2 forms a shiny attractive-looking glaze.

For Dressing No. 2, arrange bacon slices side by side on a layer of paper towels or on a microwave bacon rack. If all slices don't fit, place a paper towel atop and make another layer of bacon. Top all with another paper towel to prevent spattering. After cooking, drain bacon on paper towels, crumble and add to cooked dressing. Discard bacon drippings.

Microwave bacon on High, allowing about 45 to 60 seconds per slice. Cook until almost crisp. After microwaving, bacon will continue to cook. If you microwave it until completely crisp, it can end up brown and with an almost-burnt taste. You'll find that lean bacon cooks faster than very fatty bacon. Of course, longer, wider slices take more time than the new pan-size bacon made by a least one company (Dubuque Supreme). And Microwave Bacon (by Hormel) is a whole new story. Microwave Bacon comes with slices spread on a microwavable

cooking tray and topped with a spatter-proof cover. Just pop the whole packet into your microwave and cook. It's tops for convenience and taste.

Bacon has a bad name nutritionally. However, today's hogs are bred to produce leaner meat, so bacon today is much leaner than it used to be. On the average, two regular-size slices of crisp bacon contain fewer calories and about the same amount of fat as one poached or hard-cooked egg or one ounce of Cheddar cheese. Some brands now offer sodium-reduced bacon — which, to me, tastes very good.

For the healthiest eating, choose a lean, lower-sodium bacon. Microwave it on paper towels or a microwave rack, so fat can drip away as bacon cooks. Cook so bacon is crisp after standing time. Drain well between paper towels. Enjoy in moderation.

SWEET-SOUR BACON DRESSING NO. 1

5-6 slices bacon, diced
 1/2 cup chopped onion
 1 tablespoon cornstarch mixed with 1/2 cup cold water
 1/2 cup cider vinegar
 1/4 cup granulated sugar
 Dash black pepper

Place bacon and onion in a microwavable 1-quart measure or casserole; cover with a paper towel. Microwave (High) 5 to 6 minutes, stirring once, or until bacon is almost crisp. Remove bacon and onion (not all onion pieces need to be removed) with a slotted spoon to paper towels. Measure 2 tablespoons bacon drippings into same measure. Stir in cornstarch mixed with water, vinegar, sugar and pepper. Microwave (High) 2 to 2 1/2 minutes, stirring after each 1 minute, or until bubbly. Stir in re-

served bacon and onions. Use immediately or cover and refrigerate. Keeps refrigerated about 3 days. Makes 1 1/2 cups.

Note: For best appearance, serve this dressing warm. To reheat cold dressing, microwave on High, allowing 1 to 1 1/2 minutes for each half cup.

Hint: For ease in dicing raw bacon, use a kitchen shears or have the bacon partially frozen before dicing with a sharp knife.

Each tablespoon: 30 calories, 0 protein, 2g fat, 3g carbohydrate, 25mg sodium, 1mg cholesterol.

SWEET-SOUR BACON DRESSING NO. 2

5-6 slices bacon
 1/2 cup chopped onion
 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
 1/4 teaspoon dried thyme leaves
 1 tablespoon cornstarch mixed with 1/2 cup cold water
 1/2 cup cider vinegar
 1/4 cup granulated sugar
 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
 Dash black pepper

Arrange bacon slices side by side on a microwavable meat or bacon rack; cover with a paper towel. Microwave (High) 5 to 6 minutes or until bacon is almost crisp. Remove bacon to paper towels; set aside. Place onions, oil and thyme in a microwavable 1-quart measure; cover with plastic wrap. Microwave (High) 1 to 1 1/2 minutes or until onion is tender. Stir in remaining ingredients. Microwave (High) 2 1/2 to 3 minutes, stirring after each 1 minute, or until bubbly. Crumble reserved bacon and add. Use immediately or cover and refrigerate. Keeps refrigerated about 3 days. Serve warm or cold. Makes 1 1/2 cups.

Each tablespoon: 30 calories, 0 protein, 2g fat, 3g carbohydrate,

16mg sodium, 0 cholesterol.

EASY POTATO SALAD

4 medium potatoes
 1 1/2 cups warm Sweet-Sour Bacon Dressing

Pierce each potato in two spots. Arrange in microwave in a circle with the center open. Microwave (High) 16 to 20 minutes, turning potatoes over halfway through cooking, or until almost done. Let stand until easy to handle; then slice and combine with Dressing. Serve warm or cold. Makes 4 to 5 servings.

Note: If serving cold, use Bacon Sweet-Sour Dressing No. 2

Each serving — 1/5 of recipe: 229 calories, 6g protein, 10g fat, 57g carbohydrate, 82mg sodium, 3mg cholesterol.

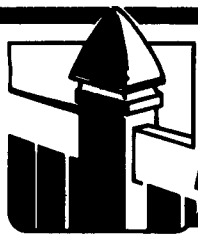
EASY CABBAGE SLAW

2 cups thinly sliced cabbage
 1/4 cup warm Sweet-Sour Bacon Dressing

Stir together cabbage and Dressing. Serve warm or cold. (If serving cold, use Bacon Sweet-Sour Dressing No. 2.) Makes 3 to 4 servings.

Hot Sweet-Sour Cabbage: Place cabbage in a 1 1/2 - to 2-quart microwavable casserole and add 1 tablespoon water; cover with plastic wrap. Microwave (High) 2 to 3 minutes, stirring once, or until cabbage is tender-crisp. Stir in dressing. Serve hot as a vegetable. Makes 2 to 3 servings.

Each serving — 1/5 of recipe: 132 calories, 3g protein, 8g fat, 15g carbohydrate, 77mg sodium, 3 mg cholesterol.



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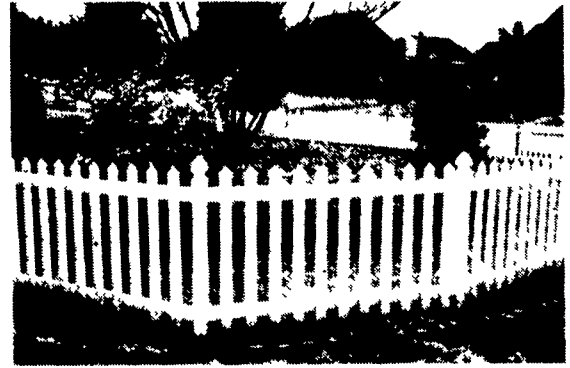
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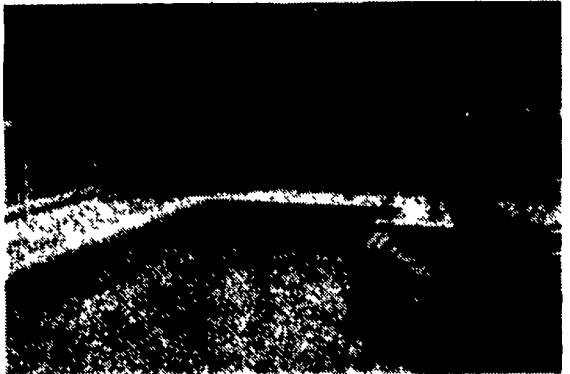
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