



# MICROWAVE MINUTES

By JOYCE BATTCHER

It's always fun to look back on favorite recipes. Here are two of mine, both from my "A Batch of Ideas" newsletter. Both came from readers.

The first, Judy's Spinach Pie, uses the microwave to start cooking the eggs, and then the whole pie finishes baking in a conventional oven or toaster oven. This is a good way to speed cooking of other quiches and also dessert pies such as pumpkin, custard and pecan. Conventional baking time is cut from 50 to 60 minutes to about 30 or 40.

Judy's Spinach Pie also uses the microwave as a helper in two other ways. Micro-thawing the spinach can be done quickly on High power. Remember to remove the spinach to a dish if it is in a foil package. A quick micro-cook of the chopped onion tenderizes it and mellows its flavor. Both of these microwaving steps are also good to use in other recipes for speed and convenience.

The second recipe, Sue's Best Ever Whole-Wheat Pancakes, is one that a reader asked me to adapt to the microwave. She wrote that these were "the most delicious and easy-to-make pancakes ever."

At first glance, I thought this recipe wouldn't adapt well, but I was fooled. I tried it conventionally and tried it in the microwave. Because of the dark-colored ingredients and the texture of wheat

germ and whole-wheat flour, the microwave version is very close in color and texture. As with most microwave recipes in relation to the conventional version, this recipe is close in flavor to the baked version.

I decreased the amount of baking powder slightly because the first time I tried this recipe there was a slightly soapy aftertaste. Dividing the batter into three lightly oiled nine-inch pie plates cooks the batter evenly and keeps it about the same height as the oven-baked ones.

If serving a family with hearty appetites or more than six, it's more convenient to bake this in the conventional oven, so I've included the directions. But, if you are cooking for four or less, the microwave method — either pancake or muffin form — is fast, easy and cool. Keep leftover batter tightly covered in refrigerator for about one week.

### Judy's Spinach Pie

- 1 package (10 ounces) frozen chopped spinach, well drained
- 2 cups (8 ounces) shredded Cheddar cheese
- 1 (9-inch) pie crust, unbaked
- 2 tablespoons chopped onion
- 1 tablespoon oil
- 6 eggs
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme leaves
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 can (12 ounces) evaporated skimmed milk

Place spinach, still in box, in

microwave (or if in foil package, remove from box to microwavable dish). Microwave (High) 3 to 4 minutes or until spinach is thawed. Drain and squeeze out excess moisture.

Sprinkle cheese in pie crust; set aside. Place onion and oil in microwavable small bowl; microwave (High) 30 to 45 seconds or until tender. Sprinkle onions evenly on top of cheese. Arrange spinach evenly over cheese; set aside. Mix eggs, thyme and pepper together in a microwavable 1-quart measure or bowl; mix in milk. Microwave on Medium (50 percent power, 325-350 watts) for 4 minutes. Stir; microwave (Medium) 3 to 4 more minutes. When eggs begin to cook, stir well and pour them over ingredients in pie crust. Bake in toaster oven or conventional oven at 350° F 30 to 40 minutes, or until knife comes out clean when inserted in center of pie. Let stand 5 to 10 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature. Makes 6 to 8 main-dish servings.

Each serving — ¼ of pie: 337 calories, 14g protein, 23g fat, 16g carbohydrate, 493mg sodium, 209mg cholesterol.

### Sue's Best Ever Whole-Wheat Pancakes

- 1 cup All-Bran cereal
- ¼ cup wheat germ
- ½ teaspoon soda
- ½ cup hot water
- ¼ cup cooking oil
- ¼ cup honey
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 cup whole-wheat flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder

Stir together cereal, wheat germ and soda; stir in hot water, oil and honey. Let stand about 3 minutes to soften cereal. Stir in egg and buttermilk until smooth; gradually stir in whole-wheat flour and baking powder; mix until well blended. Lightly oil microwavable 9-inch pie plate or round cake dish. Pour in 1 cup plus 1 scant

tablespoon batter. Cover with wax paper. Microwave on Medium (50 percent power, 325-350 watts) 2½ to 3 minutes, rotating dish once after 1½ minutes, until top is no longer doughy. Let stand, covered, 2 to 3 minutes. Cut in wedges. Serve hot with syrup, your favorite pancake topping or peanut butter. Repeat with remaining batter. Makes 3 large pancakes or 12 servings.

To make and keep: Cover and refrigerate batter to prepare one pie plate full (about 4 servings) when needed. If possible, remove batter from refrigerator about 15 minutes ahead. Otherwise, add another 1 to 1½ minutes of microwaving. Batter keeps about 1 week in refrigerator.

Muffins: Fill microwave muffin cups or small custard cups half full. For 6 muffins, microwave (High) 1½ to 2 minutes, or until no longer doughy on top. Serve warm as muffins or with syrup. Makes about 18 muffins.

Conventional: Preheat oven to 425° F. Prepare batter as above, except use 1½ teaspoons baking powder. Pour batter into greased 10x15-inch jelly roll pan. Bake 8 to 10 minutes or until firm. Cut

pancakes to desired size. Serve with your favorite topping.

Hint: Extra wedges of pancakes freeze well. To reheat in your microwave, wrap still-frozen wedges in paper and microwave on Medium, allowing 45 to 60 seconds for two wedges.

Each serving — 1/12 of recipe: 131 calories, 4g protein, 6g fat, 18g carbohydrate, 112mg sodium, 21mg cholesterol.

### Questions for Joyce?

Do you have a question about microwave cooking? Send it to Microwave Minutes, % Extra Newspaper Features, P.O. Box 6118, Rochester, Minn. 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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## Plants Brighten Winter Months

NEWARK, DE. — With good care and nurturing, your holiday plants — including cyclamen, Christmas and Thanksgiving cactus and Kalanchoe — can continue to give you pleasure through the winter months, according to Dave Tatnall, assistant Cooperative Extension horticulture agent at the University of Delaware.

"Cyclamen, a blooming plant with bright flowers, is long-lasting," says Tatnall. "But it requires very specific care."

Since this plant does not tolerate temperatures much above 65-degrees Fahrenheit, keep the plant in the coolest part of the house. Take care to keep the soil moist without overwatering and do not allow the pot to sit in water trapped in the saucer, the agent warns. Cyclamen needs plenty of sun and liquid fertilizer once a

month. As each blossom fades, remove the flower and stem.

"You may find it hard to rebloom a cyclamen," Tatnall says, "so enjoy the flowers and foliage while they last, and in the spring replace it with a warm-weather plant."

Another holiday plant that has attractive foilage and will continue to grow even after it has stopped blooming is kalanchoe. The blooms last for 10 to 12 weeks.

"Kalanchoes normally bloom in January, but they can be forced into flower any time of year just by controlling their hours of exposure to light," Tatnall explains. "This colorful flowering plant with its thick fleshy leaves should be treated like a succulent."

Do not overwater or overfeed a kalanchoe. Remove the bloom and stem when it fades. If the plant becomes too large, either repot it or cut the plant back to its original size and watch it grow again.

"With care you can enjoy your Christmas cactus and Thanksgiving cactus for many years," says Tatnall.

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