



MICROWAVE MINUTES

By **JOYCE BATTCHER**

"How can I adapt my old recipes to the microwave?" That's a question I've often been asked during my 13 years of writing "Microwave Minutes."

Here are a few tips on adapting oven casseroles to quick microwaving, plus a few delicious new recipes, too.

Look for a microwave recipe with the same kinds of main ingredients and amounts as your "old" recipe. Then use the same size dish and cover (if any) and follow the microwave timings. Stir, rearrange or rotate as the recipe directs.

If you can't find a microwave recipe as a guide, your recipe may still be good to adapt. Already-cooked foods that just need heating are perfect for microwaving. Most juicy, baked main dishes or those that call for a cover adapt well. Combinations that can be stirred micro-cook evenly and quickly.

Layered oven casseroles — like those made with layered raw potatoes — or casseroles that need crisping, such as most egg stratas, or casseroles to feed a crowd are best done in your conventional oven.

Many oven-baked recipes micro-cook in about one-fourth the time. Start by microwaving less than one-fourth and add more time

as needed. Stir and check for doneness often. Be careful not to overcook.

Remember cooking time changes if the amount, temperature, size or shape of food changes. More food or colder food means longer cooking time. Large chunks need more cooking time than thin slices.

To prevent boilovers, choose a dish one size larger than your conventional recipe calls for. For even cooking, a round deep dish is better than a shallow rectangular one.

Some recipes need changing. Start by reducing liquid by about one-fourth. If necessary, you can add more liquid before or after standing time. (For casseroles with raw pasta or rice, keep amount of liquid the same.) If water plus another liquid — such as tomato juice or broth — is called for, reduce the water and use the same amount of other liquid to keep a rich flavor. In many cases, using a richer ingredient — such as tomato sauce instead of tomato juice, or concentrated broth instead of regular strength — allows you to reduce the liquid without diluting flavor.

Precook some foods before adding other ingredients. Ground meat is usually cooked until done

before adding other ingredients. Raw onion, green pepper and celery can be tenderized before adding other ingredients. Otherwise, in quick-cooking recipes they often remain crunchy. Precook them with a tablespoon or so of water, tightly covered.

Cut foods in even-size pieces. Thin, small even-size pieces cook faster and more evenly than thick irregularly-shaped pieces. For fastest cooking, try substituting cooked or convenience foods — such as cooked meats and vegetables, tiny or cooked pasta, and instant or cooked rice.

Add toppings at the end for extra color and flavor. Sprinkle cooked food with shredded cheese; cover and let stand until cheese melts. For a low-calorie topping, sprinkle lightly with paprika before standing time. Add a crisp topping — like canned fried onions, cracker crumbs or dry bread crumbs — after standing time. Microwave uncovered for 30 to 60 seconds just to heat topping.

Easy Chicken and Rice Casserole

1 can (16 ounces) regular cut green beans, undrained

1 box (6¼ to 6½ ounces) instant long-grain and wild rice mix

1 can (10¼ ounces) condensed cream of onion or other cream soup

1 pound uncooked chicken breasts, sliced into thin strips

1 can (4 ounces) sliced mushrooms, undrained

½ cup water

¼ to 1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese

In a 3-quart microwavable casserole, stir together all ingredients (including raw rice and seasoning packet), except cheese. Cover with lid. Microwave (High) 15 to 20 minutes, stirring twice, or until rice is tender. Sprinkle with cheese, recover and let stand until cheese melts. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

Each serving— ¼ of recipe: 215 calories, 18g protein, 7g fat, 20g carbohydrate, 673mg sodium, 45mg cholesterol.

Notes on adapting: The original baked, covered, at 350° F for 45 to 50 minutes. Then it was topped with the cheese and returned to the oven to melt cheese. It used a regular seasoned rice mix and the same amount of water. Ingredients were layered in a buttered 8x12 dish. Soup and water were heated together and poured atop.

Creamy Asparagus and Turkey

2 to 2½ cups cooked asparagus pieces

1 to 1½ cups diced cooked turkey

4 oz. (½ carton) cream cheese with chives, cubed

½ cup (2 ounces) shredded Provone cheese

2 tablespoons milk

2 tablespoons sliced pimento

2 tablespoons seasoned fine bread crumbs

Paprika

Stir all ingredients together, except bread crumbs and paprika, in a microwavable 1½ -quart casserole. Microwave (High), covered, 4 to 6 minutes, stirring once, or until hot. Sprinkle with crumbs, then with paprika. Microwave (High), uncovered, 30 seconds to

heat topping. If desired, serve on rice or cooked noodles. Makes 4 servings.

Each serving: 240 calories, 18g protein, 15g fat, 6g carbohydrate, 244mg sodium, 72mg cholesterol.

Notes on adapting: The ingredients, including ¼ cup milk, were poured into a buttered casserole, topped with crumbs, dotted with 1 tablespoon butter and baked at 350° F for about 30 minutes or until bubbly.

Favorite Baked Bean Casserole

1 pound ground beef

1 medium onion, chopped

1 can (16 ounces) pork and beans

1 can (16 ounces) wax beans

1 can (16 ounces) green beans

2 cans (16 ounces each) kidney beans

½ cup brown sugar

½ cup catsup

1 tablespoon vinegar

2 teaspoons prepared mustard

Place ground beef and onion in 3-quart microwavable casserole.

Microwave (High) 5 to 6 minutes or until meat is no longer pink, stirring once. Stir in pork and beans.

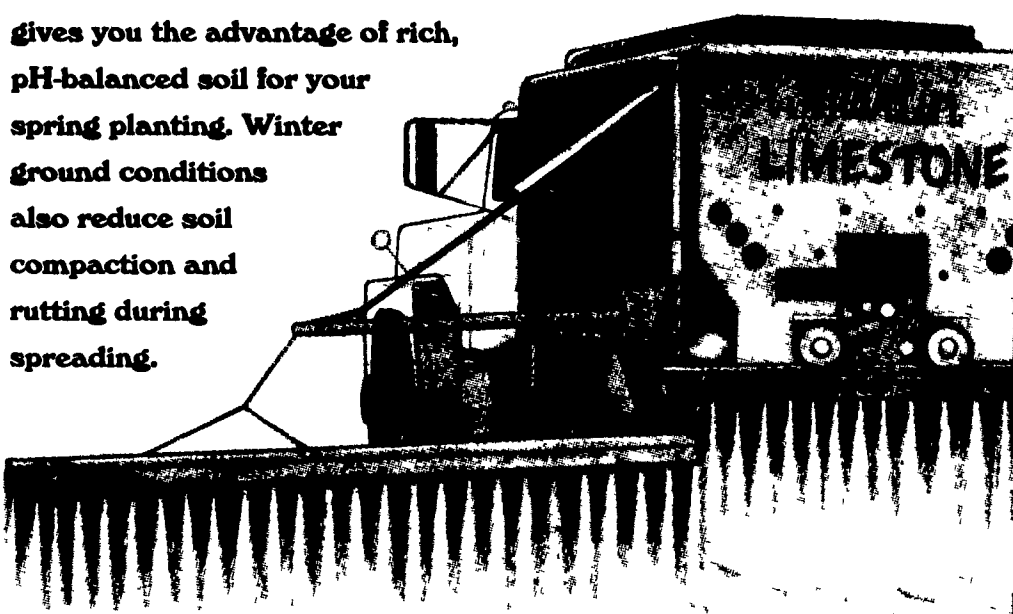
Drain all other beans, discarding liquid. Add drained beans and remaining ingredients to meat mixture. Cover with lid or waxed paper. Microwave (High) 8 to 10 minutes, stirring after each 4 minutes, or until hot. Makes 16 to 20 servings.

Each serving— 1/20th of recipe: 152 calories, 10g protein, 4g fat, 21g carbohydrate, 269mg sodium, 18mg cholesterol.



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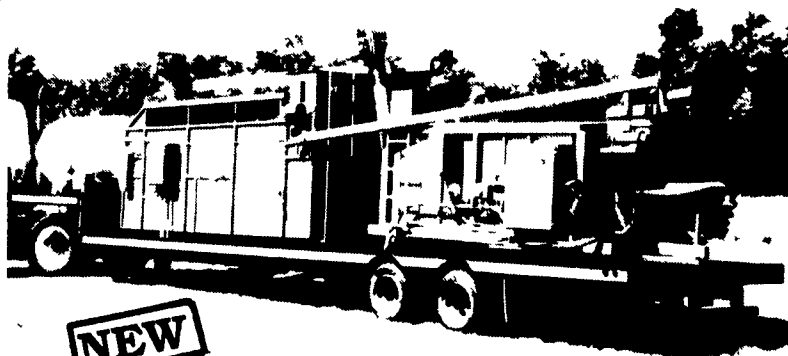
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