



Hello, friends! Welcome to my new recipe column, I'm Just Cookin'.

Whether you are a stay-at-home mom, a grandparent or a young adult, we all have to eat, so we might as well have fun cooking!

Planning meals and cooking can be a burden for most people, but for me, time in the kitchen is an escape from the rest of the world. Granted, I'm not cooking for 10 kids on a busy time schedule, so my views of cooking might be a little jaded.

I hope this recipe column helps you discover some new ideas to put a little more fun back into the kitchen. I'll admit, I have a bit of a sweet tooth, so I anticipate many of the recipes will be for desserts and other non-healthy foods. (It's OK to indulge every once in a while, right?)

I feel like I must put a disclaimer here. I'm no chef, cook, baker or health food fanatic. I imagine most of you aren't professional cooks either, so let's explore the wonderful world of food together. I won't promise to know all the answers. That's part of what makes cooking interesting. It's about learning new skills, trying new things and, if we make mistakes, making up stuff as we go along.

So to kick off the new column, here are some I'm Just Cookin' tips for you.

1. Think outside the box when you are looking for recipes. If you're getting tired of that 50-year-old cookbook, head to the internet for new ideas. I have found some great recipes on Pinterest as well as food blogs—and many have step-by-step instructions with pictures! Some individual products, like Oreos or Jello, also have fun recipes on their websites.

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Written by Darci Tomky

2. The freezer is your new best friend. No matter the size of your family, it's great to be able to cook food ahead of time and then freeze it for later on in the month. Even for something like cookies, try freezing them in packages of about a dozen. Then they will be nice and fresh when you are ready to eat them, and you won't be tempted to eat 20 cookies in a single day.

3. Have fun! Recipes are more like guidelines than rulebooks. Don't take everything so seriously. If you don't want to measure everything perfectly, great! Sometimes it's OK to take some shortcuts. And it's OK to make substitutions. Taylor the recipe to what you and your family will enjoy.

4. Don't forget to prepare! Read the recipe ahead of time and make sure you have all the ingredients and that you will have enough time to complete the recipe. You might need to set out the butter the night before or defrost the chicken. You might even want to set out everything you'll be using so that when it's time to cook, you'll be ready to go.

5. Turn the kitchen into a fun environment. I love to watch TV or listen to music while I cook. Also make sure you have good lighting and enough counter space to work properly. Need some more motivation? Buy yourself a fun apron or dishtowels to brighten up the kitchen. Or look around for some interesting platters or dishes that will put that exciting final touch on any batch of cookies or pan of brownies.

I hope you all are as excited as I am!

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