Manly man

Zucchini. When I was little you couldn't even get me to say that word.

Now that I'm in my 20s and living by myself, I've decided to grow a garden each year. This is the third summer my green thumb has decided to itch.

Each year, I try to plant cucumbers, tomatoes, various peppers, sweet corn, radishes and zucchini.

After two years of watching squirrels go nuts on my sweet corn, it was an easy decision to not plant it this year. It's been ages since I have purchased corn from vendors downtown. I usually mooch off my parents until my crop matures—what is left of it, that is.

The tomatoes and peppers get frozen and later get mixed in with my friends' produce and we spend a day making salsa. I was excited when our concoction placed third in the "hot" division at this year's Phillips County Fair. However, I later learned there were only three entries, so basically I placed last. It was still a nice surprise.

On that note, will somebody please kidnap Jerry Brandt and squeeze his recipes out of him? Or maybe he can just take a vacation next year and give some of us "little guys" a chance at placing first. Come on, man!

I've always liked cucumbers. They go great on salads. They can also work as a snack but must be dipped in ranch dressing—very healthy, I know.

I had a goal of trying to make pickles this year, but let's just say extreme summer heat has smoked the garden and I haven't picked many cucumbers.

Had I known it was never going to freeze earlier this spring, I could've planted my garden in March and things may have gone differently.

The radishes have grown great. It's fun to pick them when they are still pretty little and eat them. They always have more of a kick when they are little.

If this summer has proven anything, it is that I know how to grow zucchini. For something I don't like all that much, I sure have a ton of it.

Each year when planting zucchini, I have one goal in mind. That is to make zucchini bread. That's right, I said it, I make zucchini bread.

I got the recipe from my mom who got if from a distant relative 30 years ago.

This is the only kind of bread I have ever attempted to make. I'm not sure why I like it so much, but I do.

Each Wednesday morning we have a staff meeting here in the office and once in a while I will bring in a loaf of bread. The girls seem to eat the stuff up. They compliment me on how good it is, but deep down they are probably just being nice.

The "I'm Just Cookin'" gal, Darci, said I should come up with my own cooking column but figured I'd just do this in one shot. So take a picture. You won't see this again for quite some time. Below I have included my bread recipe.

Just remember, I am using up space that is normally assigned to sports or guy things to teach you how to bake and cook.

While I'm at it, I also wanted to share my chili recipe that raked in a little over $90 and first place during this year's midnight chili cook-off at Relay For Life.

Normally, my chili doesn't nip at the tongue quite the way it did two weekends ago. It did its job, however, and kept the relayers going until 7 a.m.

This recipe isn't hard and it didn't come from anyone. During my junior year in college, my roommates and I decided to make some chili while we were enjoying some Saturday college football one chilly fall day. So we just threw stuff into a pot and it actually turned out to be pretty good.

Zucchini Bread

—2 cups sugar

—3 eggs

—1 cup vegetable oil

—1 t. vanilla

—3 cups flour

—1 t. cinnamon (I usually fudge and add extra!)

—2 cups grated zucchini

—1 1/4 t. baking powder

—1 t. baking soda

—1 t. salt

—1/2 cup slivered almonds

Combine the first four ingredients in a bowl. Stir well. Grate zucchini (unpeeled) and add. Combine the dry ingredients and add to the mixture. Then add the nuts and stir well. Preheat the oven to 325 F and bake mixture in two well-greased loaf pans for 60 minutes, or until an inserted toothpick comes out clean.

C Lee's Chili

—2 pounds ground beef (You may also use ground pork. I've even used deer meat!)

—1 chopped onion

—2 cans stewed tomatoes

—2 cans chili ready beans

—1 can red beans

—1 can kidney beans

—1 can tomatoes and diced green chiles

—1 can diced green chiles

—2-4 chopped jalapeño peppers

—3-6 chopped Serrano peppers

—sprinkle ground cayenne red pepper

—sprinkle chili powder

Brown meat with chopped onion and drain the grease. Add remaining ingredients. I usually cook on low heat for about two hours while stirring occasionally. See, I told you it was easy.

Since this recipe makes a boat load of chili, invite a lot of people over or freeze some and enjoy on a rainy day.

There you have it. The only cooking column that will ever come from my fingertips.

You’ve been served. Enjoy!

Holyoke Enterprise September 6, 2012