



The Pleasures of Cooking for One

JUDITH JONES

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*The Pleasures
of Cooking
for One*

Judith Jones



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**To my great grandchildren,
Jonah and Odessa and Cooper and Shepard.
May they be blessed with the Muse and enjoy the pleasures
of cooking.**

Also by Judith Jones

The Tenth Muse: My Life in Food

WITH EVAN JONES

The Book of *New New* England Cookery

The Book of Bread

Knead It, Punch It, Bake It!

WITH ANGUS CAMERON

The L. L. Bean Game and Fish Cookbook

Introduction

One **Cooking Through the Week**

Poultry, meat, and fish dishes with second and third rounds and variations

Two **Soups for All Seasons**

Making seasonal soups out of what's at hand

Three **The Magic of Eggs—and the Seduction of Cheese**

Using eggs to make a meal and cheese to enhance it

Four **Improvising with Vegetable, Salads, and Sauces**

Vegetables stuffed, baked, and roasted; salads with substance; and sauces to enliven

Five **Rice, Pasta, Grains, and Legumes**

As accompaniments and carriers for leftovers

Six **Treats, Sweets, and Special Indulgences**

Breads, cookies, comforting desserts, and preserves to make on a lazy Sunday, plus a few lovely treats to enjoy alone

Acknowledgments

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After my husband, Evan, died in 1996, I was not sure that I would ever enjoy preparing a meal for myself and eating it alone. But as I described in *The Ten Muse: My Life in Food*, I was wrong, and I soon realized that the pleasure that was shared together was something to honor. I found myself at the end of the day looking forward to cooking, making recipes that work for one, and then sitting down and savoring a good meal.

A number of readers responded to the section in my book on cooking alone, with its sample recipes. One woman told me that she hadn't cooked in several years, since her husband died, but that my experience encouraged her to get going again, and she wanted more ideas. I was particularly pleased that young people on their own for the first time would approach me asking how to get started, what basics and what equipment they needed. They wanted to make for themselves relatively inexpensive, healthy, and, of course, delicious meals, but most cookbooks were too daunting and did not address the single fledgling cook on a tight food budget. I've also talked to so many live-alones who have been too busy with their careers, but who like good food and have gradually come to feel that they've been missing something.

Fifty-one percent of the population in the New York metropolitan area lives alone. Yet no one seems to cater to their needs. Supermarkets do everything they can to make us buy more than we need, and the food industry has for more than a century been selling the idea that it is demeaning for women to cook and a waste of time when they can buy ready-made products instead. So I felt compelled to write this book to share with you the strategies I have devised for beating the system. It isn't a cookbook for what Julia Child used to call "the flimsies"—that is, people who aren't genuinely interested in cooking and want fast and easy recipes and shortcuts at the expense of taste. This book is for those of you who want to roll up your sleeves and enjoy, from day to day, one of the great satisfactions of life.



I do, however, hear the naysayers protesting. Yes, I like to cook, they say, but I like to cook for *others*, to give my friends pleasure. Why would I want to go to all that trouble just for me? My answer is: If you like good food, why not honor yourself enough to make a pleasing meal and relish every mouthful? Of course, we want to share with others, too, but we don't always have family and friends around. And I can't see taking in my neighbors every night.

Others object to the expense involved, and the waste. You have to go out shopping, they complain, and buy all those pricey ingredients that chefs call for, and you can't use them up before they turn rotten. Leftovers are boring; who wants to eat cold lamb all week? Actually, it's all a matter of strategy. Moreover, you are in charge of what you're cooking, picking your own ingredients, deciding how much fat or salt or sugar you want to consume and whether you want to spend extra to have grass-fed, local beef or an organic farmyard chicken.

Cooking for yourself is particularly creative because you are inspired by what's in your fridge or freezer or garden or nearby market. You don't have to follow a recipe slavishly; you can substitute as you like—planning how to make three quite different dishes from, say, a tenderloin of pork—putting leftovers to good use, taking advantage of leftovers, having in the freezer certain basic items, and so on. If you follow the tactics I recommend, what you save

on food costs will astonish you.

Another advantage to cooking for yourself is that you have only yourself to please. So you can indulge in a sudden whim. You can choose to make just what *you* feel like—perhaps on a light, simple supper dish or a salad if you’ve consumed a rich meal at lunch that day. There’s no need to be a perfectionist, trying to win applause from your guests. If a sauce curdles, you’ll eat it anyway. And you’ll learn from your mistakes.

I suspect that a lot of Americans eat too much just because it’s there on the plate. They’ve got to clean it up. But if you deliberately set aside several chunks of meat from the stew you’ve made to use in a bean dish for a second round, you feel good about not gobbling it all up, already anticipating its reincarnation.

Then there are what I call “cook’s treats.” For instance, that package of giblets that comes with a whole roasting chicken: the liver can be used to make yourself a delicious shirred egg for breakfast or lunch; the giblets and neck will go into a soup pot. There’s often the bonus of that little bit of glaze left in the meat skillet, just enough to moisten and deepen the flavor of the hash you plan to make later in the week. To say nothing of the fact that you can afford to lavish on yourself the occasional rather expensive lobster, or soft-shell crabs, or a rich piece of goose or duck confit (the scraps of which can go into a mini-cassoulet).

Finally, there is something about going home at the end of the day or giving over a quiet Sunday afternoon to cooking—smashing the garlic, chopping an onion, getting all those good cooking smells going, stirring, and tasting mindfully, and then adjusting the seasonings—that makes us feel creative. It is a comforting form of relaxation—something that is needed in our busy lives. I always love the moment of drama, too, when everything comes together and I quickly dish up my handiwork, arranging it pleasingly on a warm plate, and then take it to the table, where I’ve set a place for one with a cloth napkin in a family napkin ring. I open up the wine and light the candles, turn on some music, and give thanks.

I wouldn’t miss this pleasure for anything. And I hope that the strategies and the flexible recipes I offer here will encourage you to join in the fun.

Cooking Through the Week

ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT WHEN COOKING FOR ONE

CONVENIENT EXTRAS

INDISPENSABLE UTENSILS

GOOD TO HAVE IN THE CUPBOARD

WHAT TO HAVE IN THE FREEZER

WHAT TO HAVE IN THE REFRIGERATOR

ESSENTIALS FOR THE VEGETABLE AND FRUIT BINS

A WORD ABOUT PORTION SIZE

THE LANGUAGE OF COOKING

Broiled Chicken

Variation: Roast Rock Cornish Hen

Variation: Whole Roast Chicken

Chicken Divan

Second round: Minced Chicken on Toast

Chicken Breast (or Leg-Thigh Pieces) Sautéed

THE NINE LIVES OF A TURKEY

Skirt Steak

Second round: Beef with Sauce Gribiche

HERBS AND SPICES

Third round: Gratin of Beef, Mushrooms, and Breadcrumbs

GOOD BEEF RAISED CLOSE TO HOME

Boeuf Bourguignon

Veal Kidneys in Mustard Sauce

Second round: Beef and Kidney Pie

Beef Shank and Oxtail Ragù

Second round: Oxtails with Grits or Polenta

Third round: Penne with a Meaty Sauce

Calf's Liver with Shallot and Wine Pan Sauce

Lemony Scaloppine of Pork

Gratinate of Pork Scaloppine with Eggplant or Zucchini Slices

A Small Roast Pork Tenderloin

Second round: Red Flannel Pork Hash

Pork Stir-Fry with Vegetables

Broiled Lamb Chop with Broiled New Potatoes

Second round: Lamb and Lentils

ABOUT GARLIC

Braised Shoulder Lamb Chops

Moroccan-Style Lamb Shanks with Potatoes and Peas

Second round: Couscous with Lamb, Onions, and Raisins

A Simplified Lamb Curry

Blanquette de Veau with Leeks

Fresh Veal Tongue

A Small Meatloaf with a French Accent

A Slice of Baked Ham

Farm-Raised Snapper with Fennel, Scallions, and Red Pepper

Baked Bass with Fingerlings and Zucchini

Fillet of Fish in Parchment

Fish Cakes

Sautéed Shrimp

Pan-Seared Salmon

Broiled Bluefish or Mackerel over a Bed of Artichoke Hearts and Potatoes

Roasted Branzino (Loup de Mer)

Steamed Mussels

Second round: Chinese Style

Third rounds: On the Half Shell with Dressing

À l'Escargot



The secret of making cooking for one fun and creative is not to think of a meal as self-contained but to understand that home cooking is an ongoing process, one dish leading to another. When I'm doing my major food shopping on the weekend, and like most working people do, I visualize the week ahead. What do I have a yen for?

How many meals am I going to be eating at home? If I buy this tempting whole tenderloin of pork, I can see using it in at least three different ways: one night, a few slices sautéed in a lemony pan sauce; another, a simple quick roast macerated first in garlic and ginger (any leftovers from that might go into a hash or a rice dish); finally, the thinner end piece cut up for an Asian-type stir-fry with lots of vegetables.

And what about fish? Most cooks feel that it doesn't keep well and has lost its bloom if you try to reincarnate it. But I've found that if I have bought a whole fish or a fillet that's too large for just me, when I use up the leftovers the next day or so in a crispy fish cake, or a fish salad, or combined with other seafood to make a fish soup, a pasta, or a risotto, it comes to life again.

No two of these dishes taste the same, so I never get bored with my leftovers. To me they are like treasures in the fridge that inspire me to do something imaginative as I play with accents from different cuisines. I try, too, to think of a meal in which the vegetables and sometimes the starch are incorporated into the main event. That way it becomes a satisfying meal-in-one-dish to sit down to.

So in this chapter, which I consider the heart of the book, are my main dishes featuring poultry, meats, and fish that have several lives. Nothing is written in stone, however. If you don't happen to have an ingredient that I suggest, try a likely substitute—a shallot for a small onion, some fennel instead of celery, a different root vegetable to replace the ubiquitous carrot, dried mushrooms for fresh. Above all, don't throw away those few tablespoons of cooked spinach, or the three or four extra spears of asparagus you couldn't quite finish, and particularly the little bit of precious juice left in the pan—all these can be used in myriad ways and offer the single home cook some creative challenges.



Essential Equipment When Cooking for One

In making dishes for one, it is crucial to have the right size pans. You can't just reduce a recipe without reducing the dimensions of the utensil in which it is to be cooked. So here are the pans that I call for frequently and which you should have at hand.

- A small, heavy pot with cover, 4-cup capacity (I favor Le Creuset), for browning and then braising. This is the pot I use the most.
- A large all-purpose 4-quart pan for pasta, stocks, and blanching vegetables
- A cast-iron skillet with a bottom diameter of 6 inches, useful for high-heat searing
- A larger, nonstick skillet with a bottom diameter of about 8 inches, for larger amounts and stir-fries
- A nonstick omelet pan with a bottom diameter of 5½–6½ inches
- A small cocotte or other flameproof casserole with lid, 1–1½-cup capacity, that can go on top of the stove and into the oven
- A single-portion shallow gratin dish 5 inches in diameter and 1¼ inches deep
- A collapsible steamer
- A medium-sized strainer

Convenient Extras

- A food processor
- An immersion blender
- A couple of Silpat mats
- A small wok with cover
- A single-portion tart ring with removable bottom
- A single-portion soufflé dish
- Poultry shears
- A large Chinese mesh spoon, called a “spider,” for scooping up pasta or vegetables
- A small nutmeg grater
- An inexpensive mandoline
- A spice grinder
- A standing mixer
- A small ice cream maker



Some of the cooking pots and pans I use most often, clockwise, starting from above right: a 4-cup Le Creuset pot; a 6-inch cast-iron skillet; inside it, a small overproof casserole with lid; a shallow gratin dish; an omelet pan



My favorite knives and a sharpening stone

Indispensable Utensils

A small whisk

A spatula

A pair of tongs

A sturdy wooden spoon or two

A good pepper mill

A box grater

A cheese grater (I much prefer a microplane or a carpenter's rasp)

Excellent knives: minimum of 1 paring knife, 1 chef's knife, and a bread knife

A sharpening stone

Good to Have in the Cupboard

Flours: all-purpose white, whole-wheat, and instant-blending

Baking powder

Baking soda

Cornstarch

Panko (Japanese breadcrumbs)

Sugars: granulated, confectioners', and brown

Salts: table and kosher

Rice: long-grain, short-grain, and wild

Peppercorns

Dried (and canned) beans (see [Legumes](#) for suggestions)

Polenta

Pastas of various shapes

Oils: extra-virgin olive oil and light olive or other vegetable oil

Toasted sesame oil

Canned chicken broth

Canned beef broth

Vinegars: red- and white-wine, aged balsamic, and rice

Canned San Marzano tomatoes

Tomato paste (refrigerate after opening)

An assortment of dried herbs and spices (the ones I use most are: bay leaves, curry, *herbes de Provence*, peppercorns, chili pepper flakes, paprika, rosemary, thyme, cinnamon, coriander, cumin, and nutmeg)

Canned tuna fish in olive oil

Canned salmon

Soy sauce

What to Have in the Freezer

Chicken broth or stock
Beef broth or stock
Glace de viande (optional; see [box](#))
Breadcrumbs
Veal, lamb, and duck broth,
if available
Tomato sauce
Cream sauce
Pesto
Nuts
Sausages
Leftover meat and poultry, raw and cooked
Bacon
Surplus fresh vegetables, fruits,
and berries
Ice cream
Bread dough
Pastry dough
Cookie dough

What to Have in the Refrigerator

Eggs
Butter, preferably unsalted
Heavy cream
Milk
Whole-milk yogurt
Cheese
Dijon mustard
Mayonnaise (Hellmann's Real or your own [homemade](#))
Yeast
In the fruit drawer:
Oranges, lemons, apples, and other seasonal fruits
In the vegetable drawer:
Scallions, ginger, parsley, salad greens (see [box](#))

Carrots

Red bell pepper

Celery

Mushrooms (best to pack them loosely in a large glass jar so they can breathe)

Ham and/or prosciutto

Smoked fish

Sausage, dried and fresh

Small jars of your own:

[Pesto](#) or [green sauce](#)

Salad dressing ([vinaigrette](#))

Meat juice and drippings

Maple syrup, if opened

Jams and/or jellies, if opened

[Preserved lemons](#)

Olives

Pickles

Essentials for the Vegetable and Fruit Bins

Onions

Garlic

Unripened fruits

Bananas

Tomatoes

Potatoes, new and for baking

Shallots

A Word About Portion Size

I have always found it somewhat presumptuous to prescribe how much anyone should eat at a meal. I feel the yield should be flexible, because it depends so much on the appetite—as well as the age, the sex, the size, and the lifestyle—of those one is feeding. An athletic, young, growing man will happily down three times as much as I can consume, and for him there probably won't be any leftovers to create the second and third rounds I enjoy eating. So, cooking for yourself, you need to treat the recipes I give you in this book only as guidelines and do the arithmetic to suit your needs. My portions reflect what I would serve myself, and they are relatively modest, allowing room for some ripe cheese with a good chunk of bread to be eaten with a salad and/or fruit to round out my dinner.

The Language of Cooking

Cooking is a sensual experience, and you really should allow all your senses full play. Enjoy the feel of ingredients, observe what is happening, taste as you go along, and drink in the heady smells that arouse your anticipation. Then, when you set everything on a plate, even if it's just for you—or especially if it's just for you—make it pleasing to the eye, adding a little color to brighten, if needed.

I feel that the language of recipes should reflect the visceral nature of cooking and invite you to participate more fully, rather than have you slavishly follow a formula. That's why I use expressions like “a pinch of salt,” “a splash of wine,” “a sprinkling of parsley,” “a fat clove of garlic,” “a handful of spinach leaves.” You don't need to measure that wine precisely. Splash some into the hot pan, let it cook down, if indicated, and then taste. It's a waste of time and too fussy to stuff that bit of chopped parsley into a tablespoon to make sure you have the “right” amount. There are times when exact measures are important, particularly in baking, but even then beware of trying to prepare a bread dough with such rigid precision, because the water content of flour can vary considerably. The only accurate guide is your hands: whether the dough *feels* too sticky or too wet.

I hope that the flexibility I'm encouraging will help you enjoy a more relaxed ease in cooking. Get the feel of a teaspoon of salt by measuring it into your hand before throwing it into the soup pot. Next time, you won't need the teaspoon measure: your hand will tell you the amount. And the more confident you get, the more you will be encouraged to experiment, to try out your own variations of some of these recipes and play with ideas of your own. Cooking for one can be particularly challenging, because often you'll find yourself wanting to reduce recipes for a large number of people to a single portion. So you need to use your wits and your imagination. And if it doesn't work perfectly the first time, try again.



Your hand will tell you.

Broiled Chicken

I use the same technique for broiling a chicken as I do for roasting it whole. I make a tasty mix of shallots, garlic, lemon rind, and herbs moistened with olive oil and rub that under the skin of the chicken at least an hour before cooking. The advantage of broiling is that it's quicker, particularly if you do the preliminary under-the-skin stuffing in the morning. Then when you get home, you have only to put the accompanying vegetables on a baking tray along with the chicken and you'll have a full dinner ready in 30 minutes with lots of good leftover chicken to play with during the week. You can, of course, just get half a chicken (leg/thigh/breast piece) and have only a little left over, but I find the birds for roasting are apt to be plumper and more flavorful, particularly if you get an organic, decently raised chicken. And I like to have the gizzards, neck, and backbone for stock, and the liver for [my own treat](#).

WHAT YOU NEED

chicken, about 3 pounds

FOR THE HERBAL UNDERCOATING

garlic clove, peeled

salt

shallot

scallion

about 2 strips lemon peel

small handful of fresh parsley

1-3 tablespoons fresh tarragon leaves, or 1 teaspoon dried

2-3 tablespoons olive oil

freshly ground pepper

COMPANYING VEGETABLES

carrot

parsnip

shallots, or 2 thick slices of a small onion, peeled

or 3 new potatoes

olive oil

salt

Rinse the chicken and pat dry thoroughly with a paper towel. Chop the garlic clove, the

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