

Home Cookin'

By Marilyn Reeves

Cooking for one can be a bit of a challenge, but I have developed certain methods and a number of favorite recipes that I rely on year in and year out. I frequently cook a standard-size batch and then freeze the leftovers in small, single-serving containers.

When I make cheese-stuffed pasta shells with marinara sauce, for instance, I simply dish out what I plan to eat the first evening, and then have enough frozen leftovers to make at least another three or four more meals out of it. When making burritos, I mix ground beef with refried beans and freeze that mixture separately from the Stokes green chili, which I divide into an equal number of containers. Then all I have to do is defrost one of each, wrap the bean mixture in a tortilla, pour the green chili on top, and *voila!* instant burritos.

So that works out well for me. But then there's the occasional disaster. Couldn't be me. Blame it on the packaging.

I must have a couple dozen of those slim glass jars of different herbs and spices. It would be nice if they were all the same brand so that the jars would match and make a nicer looking display on my spice shelf, but they're not. My dill weed and turmeric came from Spice Islands, my ginger and paprika from Kroger's Private Selection, and the thyme and coarse-ground black pepper were produced by McCormick.

The other problem with these mismatched products is this: while they all feature perforated 'sprinkler tops' there are different ways to access them. With some you flip up the outer lid. Others you twist off. It pays to watch what you're doing.

The other night I had a nice stir-fry going: small pieces of pork, sliced onion, little round discs of zucchini and cuts of celery, all seasoned with garlic and ginger and browning nicely in the pan. But, oops! I had forgotten the black pepper. So I grabbed the pepper, twisted off the lid and started to sprinkle. Except that it didn't sprinkle, it *poured*. About half the container of coarse-ground black pepper ended up smothering the entire works!

Well, what to do? First I removed the pan from the heat and then spooned all the ingredients onto a couple of layers of paper towels. Then I got out a clean skillet, and wiping off each little piece of meat and each little sliced veggie as best I could, I placed them one-by-one into the new pan. That got rid of about half of the pepper (I really couldn't do a very thorough job with the limp pieces of onion and zucchini). But I heated it all up again, added the soy sauce, poured the mixture over some brown rice and sat down, determined to eat it anyway. You think jalapeños are hot? Try a heaping helping of coarse-ground black pepper sometime. Guaranteed to burn out your tonsils and drain your sinuses.

It's times like this when I think maybe I should give up on home cooking and just stock up on TV dinners, since I burned out my taste buds anyway.