

## Quick cooking: Ranchero Catfish

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Catfish is a mild-flavored fish that can easily be combined with a wide range of seasonings, to ring the changes, to suit different tastes. In many of these variations, it can also be quickly cooked. One more consideration: It's a versatile option for those observing Lent and looking for a series of interesting fish dishes.

The following Ranchero Catfish will take only about 15 minutes, start to finish — unless you decide to make your own favorite salsa, which could add a whole five or 10 minutes more. The salsa, chosen to suit your taste, governs part of the spiciness of the finished dish, which is already vibrant with chili, lime juice and cilantro flavors.

### Ranchero Catfish (Preparation 5 minutes, cooking time 10 minutes)

4 fillets catfish (4 to 6 ounces each)  
1 cup finely crushed tortilla chips (crumb size)  
2 teaspoons chili powder  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/2 tsp ground black pepper  
3 tbs lime juice  
1 tbs vegetable oil  
1 cup of your favorite salsa

1/4 cup minced fresh cilantro (optional)

Preheat the oven to 450 F. Lightly oil a baking sheet.

Cut catfish fillets in half. Mix crushed tortilla chips, chili powder, salt and pepper in a shallow dish. Mix lime juice and oil in another shallow dish.

Dip catfish in the lime mixture, then immediately dredge in the seasoned tor-

tilla crumbs to coat. Place on prepared baking sheet. Sprinkle catfish with any remaining tortilla crumbs. Bake 8 to 10 minutes or until crisp and golden or when fish flakes easily when tested with a fork.

Warm salsa in a small saucepan over low heat. Arrange catfish on serving

plates and spoon 1/2 cup (or to taste) of salsa over top of each serving. Sprinkle with fresh cilantro and serve. Makes 4 servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 452.2 cal., 30 g total fat (6.1 g saturated), 35.3 g pro., 9.8 g carbo., 101.8 mg chol., 2.6 g fiber, 1,513.5 mg sodium.

## Vegetarian cooking: Vegetable upside-down casserole

By J.M.Hirsch

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CONCORD, N.H. — Because of the volume of recipes that flit through my kitchen, I tend to be a harsh judge when determining which become keepers and which land in the compost pile.

The herd is culled using a few basic criteria, including ease and speed of preparation, and availability of ingredients. But the most likely quality to ensure a long life in my repertoire is flexibility.

Overly prescriptive recipes calling for a particular variety of cinnamon or color of peppercorn are far too fussy for me. There is a time and place for demanding recipes, but daily cooking rarely cuts it.

Flexible recipes, such as whatever-is-the-fridge soup and omelet-of-whatever-strikes-my-fancy, are the backbone of home cooking. These dishes usually require only basic skills and equipment, but are versatile enough never to bore.

Pasta is the king of flex. I recently topped it with a saute of leftover onion, steamed broccoli, bell pepper, shelled edamame, a handful of grape tomatoes, a splash of olive oil, balsamic vinegar, and a pinch of salt and pepper.

It was easy, delicious and a great way to use up refrigerator remnants.

This bias to flexibility can leave me frustrated by cookbooks which have the audacity to insist not only that I measure but also that I use

specific ingredients.

Then I found Nava Atlas' "The Vegetarian Family Cookbook" (Broadway Books, 2004, \$17.95) — a comprehensive collection of recipes written with my sort of random pantry in mind.

Atlas is good not only at offering recipes that easily accommodate variation, but also at spelling out ideas for changes.

For example, her "Basic Muffin, Seven Ways" begs for innovation. Even before I got to Atlas' suggested variations, I was thinking how easy it would be to add pumpkin puree and spices to her recipe for great pumpkin muffins.

Her suggestions? Every home is bound to have at least one: they include raisins, raisins and nuts, berries, chocolate chips, cocoa powder, pear, dried apricots and banana.

Even the recipes that offer no suggested variations are easy to adapt to what you have on hand thanks to Atlas' reliance on straightforward dishes and mostly common ingredients.

Most of the book's 275 recipes are vegan, and most that contain dairy products offer suggestions for substitutions.

For a superbly simple and versatile main dish, try Atlas' vegetable upside-down casserole. Though I'm not sure what about this dish is upside down, it is a delicious and comforting winter meal perfect for using small amounts of spare produce.

Some combinations she suggests include: corn, tomato and scallion; broccoli and

onion; and squash and spinach.

### Vegetable Upside-Down Casserole

(Preparation 1 hour)  
3 to 4 cups vegetables, cut into bite-sized chunks  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 cup whole-wheat pastry flour  
1/4 cup wheat germ  
1/2 teaspoon baking powder  
1/2 teaspoon baking soda  
1 teaspoon salt  
3/4 cup low-fat yogurt or soy yogurt  
3/4 cup low-fat milk, rice milk or soy milk  
1 tablespoon vegetable oil  
1/2 cup grated cheese or nondairy cheese

Preheat oven to 375 F.

Heat a medium skillet over a medium flame. Add olive oil and vegetables and saute until just tender. Time will vary depending on vegetables. Set aside.

Lightly oil a round 2-quart casserole or a 9-by-13-inch baking pan.

Combine the flour, wheat germ, baking powder, baking soda and salt in a mixing bowl. Make a well in the center and add the yogurt, milk and vegetable oil. Stir together until well mixed.

Transfer the vegetables to the prepared pan. Sprinkle with cheese. Pour the batter evenly over the vegetables, gently smoothing it out with a spatula.

Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, or until the top is golden and firm. Let stand for about 10 minutes, then cut into wedges or squares to serve.

(Recipe from Nava Atlas' "The Vegetarian Family Cookbook," Broadway Books, 2004, \$17.95.)

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## Kids advocate for other children and themselves

Every child wants a home," says 12-year-old Cronetta. "So help the children in the world because everybody needs a parent."

Cronetta and her brother Robert, age 10 are spokespeople for children in foster care who are waiting for adoptive families in Mecklenburg neighborhoods. They know what it feels like to be waiting — they are waiting for parents to adopt them.

"Cronetta is insightful, engaging, and outgoing — she has a strong sense



Cronetta and Robert are two of many children waiting to be adopted in Mecklenburg County.

of responsibility, appreciates guidance, and has a positive outlook on life," says long-time friend Evelyn Dillard. "Robert has an engaging

smile, pleasant personality and has a special interest in music." Both Cronetta and Robert sing

in the church choir together.

"I love my brother, he's always been part of my life," states Cronetta. "I want to be adopted into the same family with Robert."

If you are interested in finding out more about Cronetta and Robert or other children awaiting adoption, call Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services at 704-336-KIDS (5437).

Communities for Families & Kids  
MECKLENBURG COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES DIVISION

## Keep matrimonial fires burning with respect

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site is our gender. Besides that we have a lot in common. We both wanted some of the same things out of life."

Barbara Fite (14 years of marriage): "We respect each other's differences and we're able to communicate those things to each other and don't let those things hinder us. But love plays a huge part in it.

"Communication is important because if I love you and you don't love me the way I think I should be loved I may think you don't love me. So you have to be able to communicate your needs."

• Donnie Sydnor (married 14 years): "In order to have a marriage work, it has to be Christ-centered or it's doomed. In my marriage we make God the final authority."

• Stephanie Rice (married 14 years): "Honesty and communication are the most important. I say honesty first. I know a lot of people will say trust. But if a person is honest, it's easier to trust that person. But if a person decides they are going to tell lies it's going to affect your husband/wife. And that will lead to arguments."

• Robbie Mills (7 years of marriage): "I think the key is having Christ in your marriage. If you don't, then you're making things work on your own strength. With Christ you have certain values that you represent that will blanket the marriage."

### What can ruin a marriage

"I think differences can cause problems. Especially, if it's major differences like finances or, how the children are going to be disciplined. Infidelity can also end a marriage.

"I think I'm still with my wife because God made her for me. I knew it after the first date. I never looked back and I have no regrets." Byrd

• "Don't air your dirty laundry. You and your mate may work through the problem but your family and friends will continue to look back on it. People think marriage is a fantasy. It's a job. It's a job that's longer than a 9 to 5, it's 24-7. You have to work on it to make it successful. People should treat a marriage like they treat their careers. In order to succeed in a career you should be willing to do whatever you have to do to make it succeed. But it's like we'll rather give up on a relationship than fight." Fite

• "Cheating makes your mate feel insecure. And it makes your mate feel like I can't trust you. It also could make the mate want to do the same thing. I believe the other no is lying.

"When a relationship starts out it has romance. You have the candlelight dinners. Once it goes out you may think the relationship has changed or the person isn't as interested in you anymore. Or begin to look for someone to romance them." Rice

• You can't have one selfish part in a healthy marriage. It has to be 100 percent and 100 percent not 50 percent and 50 percent." Mills

• "A marriage can't make it with selfishness." Sydnor

In a time when people were standing up for their rights, it's a good thing some decided to take a seat.



Share your story.  
Contribute to Voices of Civil Rights.

AARP and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights are working together to collect firsthand accounts of the Civil Rights Movement. Voices of Civil Rights will not only preserve these stories for generations to come, but will also serve as a memorial to those who lived through the era. The project will commemorate the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* in May 2004. From activists to observers, individual testimonies are crucial in documenting this important time in our nation's history. The stories gathered will be kept in a historical archive, housed on the Voices of Civil Rights Web site and may also appear in other media outlets. To participate visit [www.voicesofcivilrights.org](http://www.voicesofcivilrights.org) or send your 500-word account to Voices of Civil Rights, 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049.

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