



Ontario Home Economics Association

Ask a Professional Home Economist

For Immediate Release

Create Family Memories with Comfort Food

by Diane O'Shea, P.H.Ec.

A long, cold winter with dark days invites hibernation. Challenges with driving, shovelling and battling cold temperatures have been the experience for many families across Ontario this season. Getting home from work or school has been an exhausting process for many. In addition, hasn't there been enough talk about the economic down-turn? Let's put the weariness aside! The days are getting longer and late winter prompts the perfect opportunity to bond with family. What better way to do so than to use food as the catalyst!

Gather the family around the kitchen table and pour over those collected recipes. You may have an assortment of clipped 'to use someday' pieces or treasured cards and notes stained and faded but precious with memories of family or friends. You may have heirloom recipes that you wish to preserve or share for sentimental reasons. What conversation pieces! Then there might be a collection of enticing recipe inserts that you found tucked in a magazine or attached at point-of-sale promotions.

The cookbook collection on the shelf might draw the eye of some family member. The sometimes-smudged pages invite stories to share of past food products, processes or popular trends. Outdated cooking tools and specialty cookware come to mind – perhaps now stored in the back of a cupboard or high on shelves. Newer, more recently acquired books also beg browsing. Pictures and tips stimulate creative menu planning and encourage you to try something new. Many recently released cookbooks draw attention to local and in-season foods to demonstrate respect for the environment and the economy – a perfect lesson for the whole family.

All of this food talk can lead to only one thing. Dinner! Anticipate slow-roasting aromas – making real and affordable food like mashed potatoes, baked beans or bread fresh from the oven. Continue the family time past the menu-planning stage to the cooking-together stage. It's time well invested and sure to brighten a winter day.

Try a comfort food such as baked beans – they freeze well and make a very economical meal – high in fibre, low in fat.

For a delicious healthy breakfast, spread baked beans over whole-grain toast and top with a little grated cheddar cheese. Serve with orange slices.

Top baked potatoes or whole-wheat buns with baked beans and serve with coleslaw or a favourite green salad – perhaps on a night set aside for family games.

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FAMILY FAVOURITE BAKED BEANS

White pea beans are grown in Ontario, are reasonably priced, easily stored and highly nutritious. Savour the slow-cooked flavours of the beans as they combine with onion, tomatoes, chili sauce, maple syrup and smoked pork.

3 cups (750 mL) dried white pea beans
 1 to 2 onions, chopped
 1 can (28 oz/796 mL) diced tomatoes
 1 cup (250 mL) pure maple syrup
 1 cup (250 mL) chili sauce (preferably homemade)
 1 or 2 smoked pork chops, cooked and diced (optional) **

1. Rinse the beans and place in a large pot. Cover with cold water to soak for at least 6 to 8 hours or overnight. Drain the beans. Much of the water will have been absorbed into the beans. Transfer beans to a very large (at least 16-cup/4 L) casserole dish or roasting pan.
2. Stir in chopped onions, diced tomatoes, maple syrup, chili sauce and diced smoked pork.
3. Add water to cover the entire mixture.
4. Cover baking dish and place in a 300 degrees F (150 degrees C) oven. Bake for at least 4 hours, stirring often and adding more water if the beans become too dry, until beans are tender. The cooking time will vary depending on the beans.

Serves 8 – 10

** A small smoked pork roast or ham can be used. The saltiness and smokiness both truly enhance this dish. You can use regular pork chops if you wish to skip the smokiness. Skip the pork altogether to make a vegetarian option.

If short on time, start with 3 - 19 oz (540 mL) cans of mixed beans (drained and rinsed) and then pick up at Step # 2. Reduce baking time to 1-1/2 hours. You may want to look for 'low-sodium' or 'no salt added' varieties – often available in organic products.

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The Ontario Home Economics Association, a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists, promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life.

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