

Good Food NEWS

The Magic of the Family Meal

By Nancy Gibbs *Eating Smart*, June 4, 2005

Close your eyes and picture Family Dinner. June Cleaver is in an apron and pearls, Ward in a sweater and tie. The napkins are linen, the children are scrubbed, steam rises from the green-bean casserole, and even the dog listens intently to what is being said. The idealized version is as close to a regular worship service, with its litanies and lessons and blessings, as a family gets outside a sanctuary.

That ideal runs so strong and so deep in our culture and psyche that when experts talk about the value of family dinners, they may leave aside the clutter of contradictions. Just because we eat together does not mean we eat right: Domino's alone delivers a million pizzas on an average day. Just because we are sitting together doesn't mean we have anything to say: children bicker and fidget and daydream; parents stew over the remains of the day.

Yet for all that, there is something about a shared meal--not some holiday blowout, not once in a while but regularly, reliably--that anchors a family even on nights when the food is fast and the talk cheap and everyone has someplace else they'd rather be. And on those evenings when the mood is right and the family lingers, caught up in an idea or an argument explored in a shared safe place where no one is stupid or shy or ashamed, you get a glimpse of the power of this habit and why social scientists say such communion acts as a kind of vaccine, protecting kids from all manner of harm.

In fact, it's the experts in adolescent development who wax most emphatic about the value of family meals, for it's in the teenage years that this daily investment pays some of its biggest dividends. Studies show that the more often families eat together, the less likely kids are to smoke, drink, do drugs, get depressed, develop eating disorders and consider suicide, and the more likely they are to do well in school, delay having sex, eat their vegetables, learn big words and know which fork to use. "If it were just about food, we would squirt it into their mouths with a tube," says Robin Fox, an anthropologist who teaches at Rutgers University in New Jersey, about the

mysterious way that family dinner engraves our souls. "A meal is about civilizing children. It's about teaching them to be a member of their culture."

The most probing study of family eating patterns was published last year by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University and reflects nearly a decade's worth of data gathering. The researchers found essentially that family dinner gets better with practice; the less often a family eats together, the worse the experience is likely to be, the less healthy the food and the more meager the talk. Among those who eat together three or fewer times a week, 45% say the TV is on during meals (as opposed to 37% of all households), and nearly one-third say there isn't much conversation.

The food-court mentality--Johnny eats a burrito, Dad has a burger, and Mom picks pasta--comes at a cost. Little humans often resist new tastes; they need some nudging away from the salt and fat and toward the fruits and fiber. A study in the Archives of Family Medicine found that more family meals tends to mean less soda and fried food and far more fruits and vegetables.

Beyond promoting balance and variety in kids' diets, meals together send the message that citizenship in a family entails certain standards beyond individual whims. This is where a family builds its identity and culture. Legends are passed down, jokes rendered, eventually the wider world examined through the lens of a family's values. In addition, younger kids pick up vocabulary and a sense of how conversation is structured. They hear how a problem is solved, learn to listen to other people's concerns and respect their tastes. "A meal is about sharing," says Doherty. "I see this trend where parents are preparing different meals for each kid, and it takes away from that. The sharing is the compromise. Not everyone gets their ideal menu every night." So pull up some chairs. Lose the TV. Let the phone go unanswered. And see where the moment takes you.

WHAT'S LOCAL: This week's feature, garlic, is grown by Lena and Ira Stoll, Mennonite organic farmers known and loved for the spectacular garlic that they grow for us every year. Treasure it--it's the best garlic in town.

FIELD T TABLE

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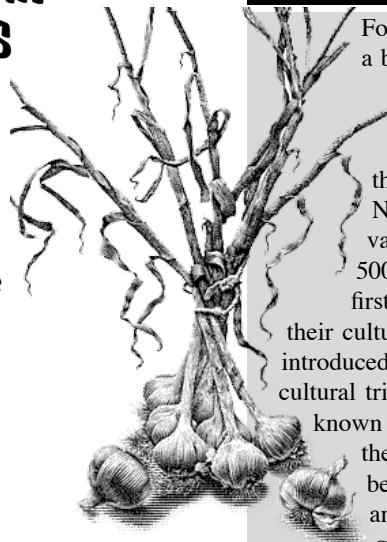


recipes

GARLIC PARMESAN EGGPLANT SLICES

4 Servings.

- 1 med. (1 lb.) eggplant 1/4 inch slices
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/2 c. all-purpose flour
- 1/2 c. seasoned bread crumbs
- 1/4 c. freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 tbsp. basil leaves
- 1/3 c. Olive or vegetable oil
- 1/2 tsp. pepper
- 1 tsp. minced fresh garlic
- 2 eggs, slightly beaten
- 1 c. (1 med.) chopped ripe tomatoes



featured this week: GARLIC

For a small vegetable, garlic (*Allium sativum*) sure has a big, and well deserved, reputation. This member of the Lily family, a cousin to onions, leeks and chives, can transform any meal into a bold, aromatic and healthy culinary experience. Garlic is arranged in a head, called the "bulb," which is made up of separate cloves.

Native to central Asia, garlic is one of the oldest cultivated plants in the world and has been grown for over 5000 years. Ancient Egyptians seem to have been the first to cultivate this plant that played an important role in their culture as in the Greek and Roman cultures. Garlic was introduced into various regions throughout the globe by migrating cultural tribes and explorers. By the 6th century BC, garlic was known in both China and India, the latter country using it for therapeutic purposes. Throughout the millennia, garlic has been a beloved plant in many cultures for both its culinary and medicinal properties. Over the last few years, it has gained unprecedented popularity since researchers have been scientifically validating its numerous health benefits.

Store fresh garlic in either an uncovered or a loosely covered container in a cool, dark place away from exposure to heat and sunlight. This will help maintain its maximum freshness and help prevent sprouting, which reduces its flavor and causes excess waste. It is not necessary to refrigerate garlic. Some people freeze peeled garlic; however, this process reduces its flavor profile and changes its texture. Depending upon its age and variety, whole garlic bulbs will keep fresh from two weeks to two months. Inspect the bulb frequently and remove any cloves that appear to be dried out or moldy. Once you break the head of garlic, it greatly reduces its shelf life to just a few days. Chopping or crushing stimulates the enzymatic process that converts the phytochemical alliin into allicin, a compound to which many of garlic's health benefits are attributed. In order to allow for maximal allicin production, wait several minutes before eating or cooking the garlic.

Place eggplant on 15 x 10 x 1 inch jelly roll pan; sprinkle with salt. In 9 inch pie pan stir together flour, bread crumbs, Parmesan cheese and basil. In 10 inch skillet cook olive oil, pepper and garlic over medium heat until sizzling. Meanwhile, dip eggplant slices into eggs; coat with flour mixture. Fry 1/2 of eggplant slices in olive oil until golden brown (2 to 3 minutes on each side). Remove to serving platter; keep warm. Repeat with remaining eggplant slices. Remove to serving platter; sprinkle with tomato. Cover with aluminum foil; let stand 2 minutes or until tomato is heated through.

CHILI-GARLIC MUSTARD GREENS

4 Servings

- 2 tbs Sesame seed oil
- 2 tbs Olive oil
- 1lb Greens such as green or purple mustard, chard, beet, turnip, kale, dandelions, washed, dried & cut into strips
- 1 tbs Garlic minced
- 1 tbs Chili pepper minced or to taste
- 1 tbs Fresh ginger minced
- 2 tbs White vinegar
- 1 tsp Sugar
- Salt & black pepper to taste

In a large saute pan, combine sesame and olive oils, and place over high heat until hot but not smoking. Add the greens, and stir vigorously for 1 minute, or until they have changed to a bright green color. Add garlic, chili and ginger, and continue to cook, stirring constantly, for 30 seconds. Add vinegar and sugar, remove from heat and stir to combine. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and serve at once.

Tip: If the greens you are using are tougher, blanch them for 4 minutes or until tender, then drain well and chop.

BY ANY OTHER NAME...GARLIC

- Allium sativum - Latin
- Knoblauch - German
- Ajo - Spanish
- Ail - French
- Aglio - Italian
- Garlic - Portuguese
- Knoflook - Dutch

DELIVERIES

for the week of: Oct. 3rd
orders are due 5 pm Tues. Sept. 26th

for the week of Oct. 10th
orders are due 5pm Tues. Oct. 3rd.



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