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# Hooray for Mechanical Servants

## 1950s



- 1950** **Dunkin' Donuts** and **Sugar Pops** cereal sweeten breakfast while the **Green Giant Company** adds canned vegetables to the dinner menu. **Whataburger** is founded in Corpus Christi. You can throw all the new product packaging in **green plastic garbage bags**. The new decade also finds uses for **artificial sweeteners**.
- 1951** If you know how to turn on an oven, you can bake **Swanson beef, chicken** and **turkey pot pies**.
- 1952** Life is getting easier and easier with the **automatic coffeepot**, **Saran Wrap**, **frozen fish sticks**, **Lipton onion soup mix** and **Kellogg's Frosted Flakes**. **Colonel Sanders** starts franchising his secret recipe for fried chicken.
- 1953** C.A. Swanson & Sons produces too many turkeys and puts some of them into single-compartment aluminum trays along with dressing, peas and sweet potatoes—voilà, the **TV dinner** is born. (Clarence Birdseye had been freezing food since 1923, but the trays made all the difference.) The march of progress continues with **Cheez Whiz** and **Lawry's spaghetti sauce**. But there's no reason to cook at all if you can go to one of the first **McDonald's** franchises.
- 1954** More than 25 million TV dinners are eaten in front of 33 million TV sets in American living rooms. There's no reason to frequently open your **color-coordinated** oven to check on the **self-basting turkey**.
- 1955** Campbell's develops the indispensable **Green Bean Casserole Bake** recipe.
- 1956** Kaiser Aluminum introduces the **first aluminum can** to compete with tinned steel cans.
- 1957** **Tang**, the orange breakfast beverage crystals, are introduced. They will eventually nourish astronauts. If **Sweet 'n Low** sugar substitute doesn't take off all the pounds you want, use **Pam** cooking oil spray.
- 1958** **Rice A-Roni**, **tater tots** and **Lipton instant tea** hit the grocery store. **International House of Pancakes** makes its debut.

**Hooray for Mechanical Servants** For most American families, the Fifties are a time of plenty. Children of the Fifties grow up expecting meat with every meal, leading some historians to dub this “the Meat Decade.” Beef, chicken and pork—once a scarce luxury—take center stage during the main meal. There is bacon or sausage to go with the fried eggs each morning.

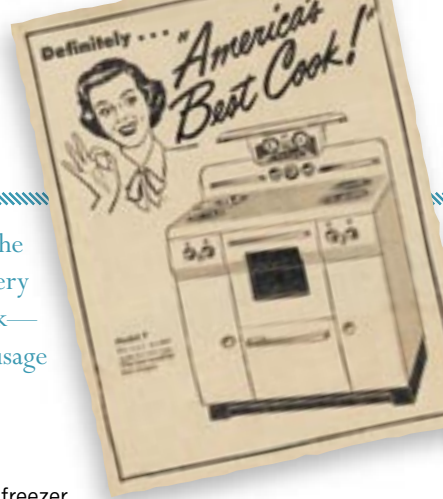
When the main meal—dinner—is served might depend on whether you are a farmer/rancher or a city worker. People who work the land still need their big meal at lunch, which is dinner. Evening’s supper can be lighter. In town, “dinner” usually means the evening meal, except for Sunday. Everybody eats Sunday dinner after church.

In town, one income is usually adequate to provide a family with home, hearth, an American-made sedan and a refrigerator bulging with new products. Advertisements in *Texas Co-op Power* emphasize that there is room for a whole week’s supply of food in the fridge. In 1953, Philco touts its 18 1/2-cubic-foot freezer (\$499.95) as “truly a farm-size freezer.” International Harvester even offers decorating tips in July 1953: Take 1 3/4 yards of cloth, the advertisement suggests, and cover the front

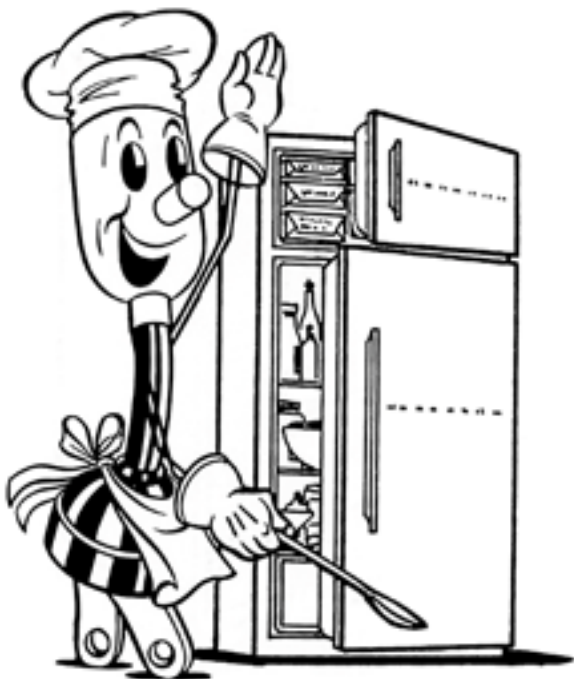
of your 14-cubic-foot upright freezer with a pattern that complements your kitchen. But many people still call anything that keeps food cold an “ice box,” harkening back to when fresh food had to be iced down.

By 1950, approximately 80 percent of American farms are electrified, compared to 11 percent that had electricity in 1932. About 1 million farms are still waiting for the miracle juice. Labor-saving devices, both mechanical and culinary, make chores easier than ever before. As Sue Brandt McBee, author of *The Electric Homemaker* column, writes in the March 1950 issue, “The hand that rocks the cradle now runs the washing machine, dishwasher, vacuum cleaner, sewing machine and an increasing number of other mechanical servants.”

For a second decade, *Texas Co-op Power* advertisements from major appliance companies emphasize the efficiency and proper use of modern conveniences. One ad points out that because Mom is now cooking with a clean, safe electric stove, she no longer has to tend to the stove so carefully. Many women have their first opportunity to bake at a constant temperature. By 1957, Frigidaire is selling its Imperial Range in “four glamorous colors at no extra charge.”



*Below: This handsome fellow is Willie Wiredhand, the electric cooperatives' mascot. Right: The Oscar Meyer Weinermobile.*



At night, the family settles down to watch television. In more permissive households, viewing might start during dinner on TV trays in the living room. A household has but one TV, so everyone watches together. Top choices include "I Love Lucy," "Dragnet," "Gunsmoke," "The Jackie Gleason Show" and "The Ed Sullivan Show." Cartoon shows rule children's Saturday mornings, adding commercial sponsors Sugar Pops, Sugar Smacks, Frosted Flakes and Cocoa Puffs to the American diet.

The major food product companies jump to provide frozen TV dinners. Swanson beef, chicken and turkey potpies are followed by frozen fish sticks and compartmentalized TV dinners in aluminum trays. Virtually every teen babysitter can heat up fish sticks and tater tots. Dunked in ketchup, they are among the earliest "fast" foods.

Of course, *Texas Co-op Power* provides recipes for homemade fare. But some frozen foods find a place in our pages. The July 1959 issue touts fish-stick toastwiches, fish-stick omelettes, fish-stick skillet hash and fish-stick vegetable balls.

The vast majority of our recipes during this time are hearty and filling. Casseroles made with condensed soups, onions, green peppers and a bay leaf are emblematic. But spices such as basil, marjoram and thyme creep into spaghetti dishes made with canned tomatoes. We offer instructions for Chinese chow mein

and Mexican empanadas. Recipes also include lobster and crab, artichokes and asparagus, plus the occasional soupçon of wine.

More sophisticated menus are a reflection of the modern cook's time and inclination to experiment. Attention is given to presentation of dishes and decoration for seasonal events. Women sew or embroider special linens for canasta tables at luncheon affairs where lighter repast is appreciated. "In planning the menu for such a party, it's well to remember that most women today, young or old, are wisely inclined to watch their figures," we advise. "So you shouldn't give them a lot of rich, hearty pound-making food."

Fortunately for those concerned about their figures, artificial sweeteners make their debut in the Fifties. You can put artificial sweetener in instant iced tea, but neither is among the proudest innovations of the period. City people begin to watch their weight because of the trickle of franchise fast food operations, soon to become a greasy torrent of temptation. Among those founded in the Fifties are Dunkin' Donuts, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Taco Bell, Jack-in-the-Box, McDonalds, Burger King and Whataburger, the Texas contribution. Dairy Queen had already established itself as the center of teen social life in small-town Texas.

Such is progress at mid-century.



*Above: Women save time by making the whole meal at once in a "modern" electric cooker. Left: June Pritchard of Baylor County, Miss Texas 1955, in a knotty-pine kitchen.*

## German Sweet Chocolate Cake (A)

### Cake

- 1 package German sweet chocolate
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 cup shortening
- 2 cups sugar
- 4 egg yolks
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 1/2 cups sifted cake flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 4 egg whites, stiffly beaten
- 1 cup buttermilk

Melt chocolate in boiling water. Cool. Cream shortening and sugar until light and fluffy. Add egg yolks, one at a time, beating after each addition. Add chocolate and vanilla. Sift flour with baking soda and salt. Add flour mixture alternately with buttermilk to egg mixture, beating after each addition until smooth. Fold in stiffly beaten egg whites. Pour into three 8- or 9-inch lightly greased and floured cake pans, which have been lined on the bottom with waxed paper. Bake at 350° 35 to 40 minutes. Cool on cake racks. Frost with Easy Chocolate Icing.

### Easy Chocolate Icing

- 3 tablespoons butter
- 2 squares unsweetened chocolate
- 1 box confectioners' sugar
- 7 tablespoons canned milk

Melt butter and chocolate together. Add to sifted confectioners' sugar. Add enough milk to make spreading consistency.

*Mrs. Carl Prewitt, Kirbyville*

## Powdered Sugar Pound Cake

- 1 pound whipped margarine
- 1 box powdered sugar
- 6 eggs
- Powdered sugar box full of sifted cake flour, packed a little firm
- 1 1/2 teaspoons coconut extract
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla

Cream margarine. Add sugar and blend together with fork and then beat on slow speed with electric mixer. Cream until smooth. Add the eggs one at a time alternately with the flour. Add flavorings. Bake in ungreased 10-inch angel food cake pan for 30 minutes at 300°. Lower temperature to 275° and cook 1 hour or until done.

*Mrs. Calvin Ebner, Deweyville*

## German Sweet Chocolate Cake (B)

### Cake

- 1 package German sweet chocolate
- 1/2 cup hot water
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla
- 1 cup shortening
- 4 egg yolks
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 4 egg whites

Melt chocolate in boiling water. Cream together sugar, vanilla and shortening. Add chocolate. Add egg yolks and mix well. Dissolve soda in buttermilk and add alternately with flour. Fold in stiffly beaten egg whites. Mix thoroughly. Bake in two 9-inch layer pans that have been well greased and floured. Bake at 350° for 35 minutes. Frost and fill cooled cake with Filling.

### Filling

- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 1/2 cup margarine
- 1 cup flaked coconut
- 1 1/2 cups chopped pecans
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla

Cook together sugar, flour, milk and margarine until thick. Add coconut, pecans and vanilla.

*Mrs. Lloyd Drummond, Newton*

**PRIZE-WINNING RECIPES ...  
IN CO-OP CAKE BAKE**

Sounds like there was some 'specially good eating in the Kirbyville area in November. The incentive for baking some special cakes was provided when Jasper-Newton Electric Co-op announced a cake-baking contest.

The idea was obviously a popular one. Seven appliance dealers supplied new electric ranges for the contestants to use for demonstration clubs, PTAs and homemakers' clubs, and civic groups cooperated, too. And

home economics experts contributed their services as judges.

All told, 128 women and girls competed. Eighty-seven of them were used to cooking on non-electric stoves. Now, apparently, a lot of eyes are newly turned toward electric ranges. As Mrs. Gene Cannon, Jasper-Newton Electric's home economist, describes it, "Electric cooking sells itself!"

Mrs. Cannon, as contest coordinator, scheduled a contest for each of the major communities of the co-op's area. There were so many entries in some communities that

these area contests ran as long as three days. Each day's winner received an electric skillet for her excellence.

Grand prize in the contest—a new electric range—went to Mrs. Carl Prewitt of Kirbyville. The other finalists placed in this order: Mrs. Calvin Ebner, Deweyville; Mrs. Lloyd Drummond, Newton; Mrs. J.D. Burrell, Evadale; and Mrs. Bert Hinson, Jasper. [The recipes for the prize-winning cakes are on these two pages.]

February 1959

**Bonnie Butter Cake**

**Cake**

- 2/3 cup soft butter
- 1 3/4 cups sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla
- 3 cups cake flour
- 2 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/4 cups milk

Beat butter, sugar, eggs and vanilla 5 minutes at high speed in mixer. Sift flour, baking powder and salt. Add in four additions alternately with milk. Start and end with dry ingredients. Blend on low speed until smooth. Bake 30 to 35 minutes in two 9-inch layer pans (greased and floured) at 350°. Frost with Fluffy Marshmallow Icing and sprinkle with coconut.

**Fluffy Marshmallow Icing**

- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup water
- 1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar
- 2 egg whites
- 8 large marshmallows
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 can flaked coconut

Combine sugar, water and cream of tartar in saucepan. Boil rapidly until syrup spins a 6- to 8-inch thread. While syrup cooks, beat egg whites stiff. As soon as syrup threads, stir in marshmallows until dissolved. Pour syrup over egg whites. Add vanilla. Blend well.

*Mrs. J.D. Burrell, Evadale*

**Fresh Coconut Cake**

**Cake**

- 2 1/4 cups cake flour
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup shortening
- 1 cup milk
- 3/4 teaspoon orange extract
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 4 egg whites, unbeaten

Sift flour, sugar, baking powder and salt into mixing bowl. Drop in shortening. Add milk and flavorings, and beat 200 strokes (2 minutes by hand or in mixer at low speed). Scrape bowl and spoon or beater. Add egg whites and beat 200 strokes (2 minutes in mixer). Bake 20 to 25 minutes in two 9-inch greased and floured pans at 350°. Spread with Seven Minute Frosting, between layers and on top and sides of cake. Sprinkle with fresh coconut.

**Seven-Minute Frosting**

- 1/3 cup cold water
- 2 egg whites
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar or 1 tablespoon Karo syrup
- 1/2 teaspoon orange extract
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
- Freshly grated coconut

Place all ingredients except coconut in top of double boiler. Beat constantly with hand-held electric mixer until icing stands in peaks.

*Mrs. Bert Hinson, Jasper*