

Give Peas a Chance

BY SHANNON OELRICH My good friend Lee Bell was a veggie hater. She hated pretty much every vegetable if it was cooked. She'd eat a salad, or a crunchy raw carrot, but no cooked veggies, especially fried, because that's how her mother cooked vegetables. She says, "I think my mom went to the cafeteria school of cooking—fry them or boil them until they're mush."

Over the years, though, with a talented cook for a boyfriend and a lot of "foodie" friends, she's learned that she actually likes vegetables. She found out it's all in the cooking. "Now I like them just lightly steamed or barely cooked. Fresh is a must, and don't even call me if the green beans have come out of a can."

I find this is true for many people who profess to hate certain veggies—they've just never had produce that was in season, freshly prepared and cooked by an expert. Rather than cooking green beans to a mush, try blanching them quickly and serving them cold with a vinaigrette, as in this Green Bean and Cherry Tomato Salad.

Brussels sprouts are often at the top of the "most hated" list, but I've gotten people to try them and even love them with a family recipe, Sautéed Brussels Sprouts. Lee says, "I always hated Brussels sprouts, but my mom never cooked them in bacon. That bacon part is the key."

GREEN BEAN AND CHERRY TOMATO SALAD

- 1 pound green beans
- 10-12 cherry tomatoes
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- 1½ teaspoons Dijon mustard
- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

Snap stems off green beans and wash. Blanch green beans by bringing salted water to a rapid boil, adding beans, and cooking for 8 to 9 minutes. Remove beans from boiling water and immerse in a bowl filled with ice and water to cool them quickly. Drain off cold water and store in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

Make the vinaigrette by mixing together vinegar and mustard, then drizzling in olive oil while whisking. Add salt and pepper to taste.

In large bowl, place chilled green beans and halved cherry tomatoes. Drizzle with vinaigrette and toss. Serve cold.

Serving size: ¼ of recipe. Per serving: 101 calories, 2 g protein, 6 g fat, 9 g carbohydrates, 100 mg sodium, 0 mg cholesterol

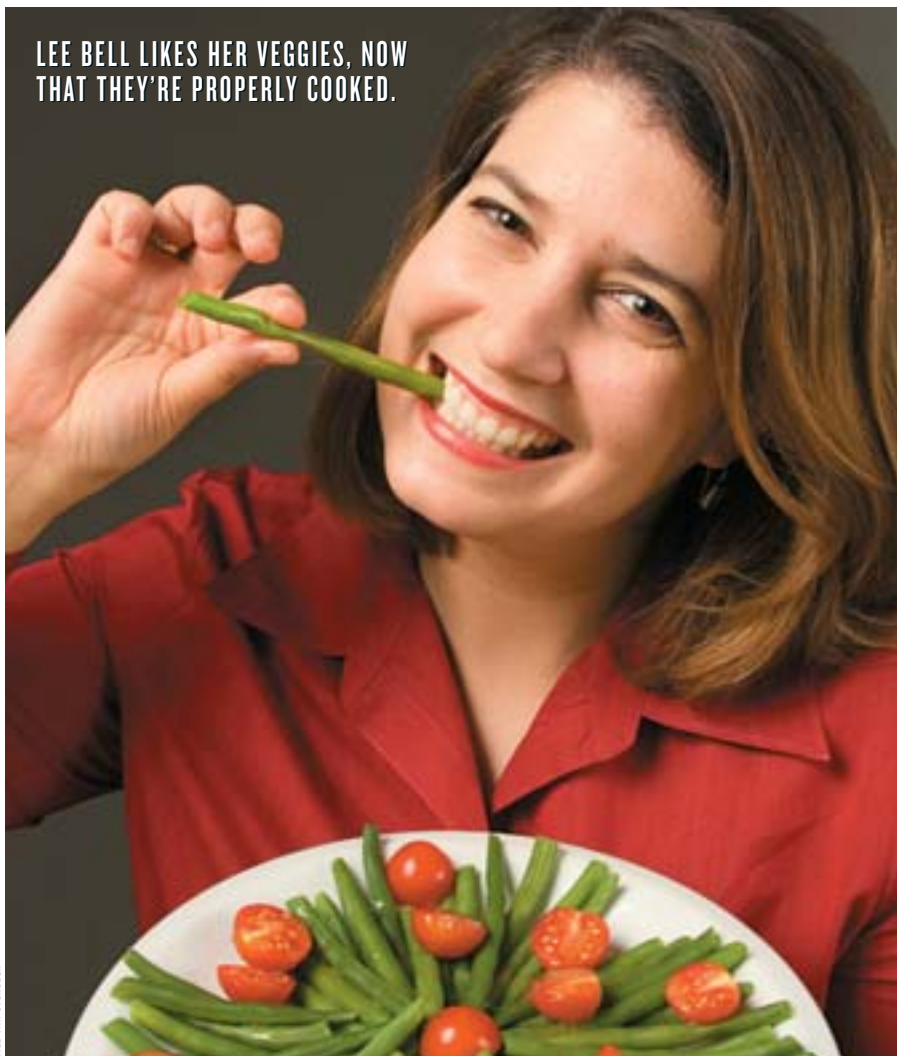
SAUTÉED BRUSSELS SPROUTS

- 1 pound fresh Brussels sprouts
- 2 strips thick-cut bacon
- 1½ teaspoon minced shallot
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- Salt and pepper to taste

Cut stem ends off Brussels sprouts, remove outer leaves, and cut in half. Wash thoroughly. Blanch in salted water (see above for directions) for about 5 to 6 minutes. Drain well and set aside. Chop bacon; fry over medium-high heat in large pan or cast iron skillet until brown and crisp. Remove bacon; set aside. Lower heat to medium. Add shallot and Brussels sprouts to pan; toss and coat with bacon grease. Sauté, stirring frequently, until cut sides of Brussels sprouts are golden brown (about 15 to 20 minutes). Taste occasionally to be sure you're not overcooking—Brussels sprouts should still be a little firm in center.

Remove from heat and immediately drizzle on balsamic vinegar and toss. Salt and pepper to taste, and sprinkle with reserved bacon pieces. Serve hot.

Serving size: ¼ of recipe. Per serving: 90 calories, 4 g protein, 4 g fat, 10 g carbohydrates, 110 mg sodium, 4 mg cholesterol



LEE BELL LIKES HER VEGGIES, NOW THAT THEY'RE PROPERLY COOKED.

WILL VAN OVERBEEK

1st**SUE WHITTED** *Hamilton County Electric Cooperative*

Prize-winning recipe: "Mom Hid the Vegetables" Italian Sausage Casserole

This month's winning recipe is a casserole brimming with Italian flavor, chunks of sausage, and gooey cheese. Whitted writes, "I created this recipe to get my family to eat squash." The big question is: Does she tell them they're eating squash?

"MOM HID THE VEGETABLES" ITALIAN SAUSAGE CASSEROLE

- 1 pound mild Italian bulk sausage
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 2 medium zucchini, grated
- ½ cup chopped onion
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- 1 large can (13.25 ounces) mushroom pieces and stems, drained
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon oregano
- ½ cup plain bread crumbs
- 1 cup grated Monterey Jack cheese
- 3 tablespoons sour cream
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese

Cook sausage and drain. Sauté zucchini, onion and garlic in butter until soft, 5 to 7 minutes. Add mushrooms and heat through. Add salt, oregano and bread crumbs. Add sausage, Monterey Jack cheese and sour cream. Pour into 9x11-inch ovenproof dish. Top with Parmesan cheese and heat under broiler until cheese is brown and bubbly. Serves 6 to 8.

Serving size: 1 square. Per serving: 359 calories, 16 g protein, 28 g fat, 10 g carbohydrates, 811 mg sodium, 70 mg cholesterol

Cook's Tip: Tired of lifeless-looking veggies? Use a non-iodized salt, like kosher salt, instead of table salt when cooking vegetables in boiling water. It'll help your green beans stay green!

VEGETABLE TORTILLA LASAGNA

- 1 large zucchini, cut crosswise into ¼-inch slices
- ¾ cup corn (thawed if frozen or canned whole kernel, drained thoroughly)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- ¼ cup ricotta cheese (divided)
- 1¼ cups grated Monterey Jack cheese (divided)
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 cup tomato salsa
- 6 corn tortillas
- 1 jar (7 ounces) roasted red peppers, drained and patted dry, chopped or sliced
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro, divided
- Lime wedges

Preheat oven to 500 degrees and grease two shallow 9x13-inch baking pans and an 8-inch loaf pan. Arrange zucchini in one layer in first baking pan and in half of second baking pan. Spread corn in remaining half of second pan. Season zucchini and corn with salt and pepper and roast in upper and lower thirds of oven, stirring corn and switching position of pans halfway through roasting, about 10 minutes or until lightly browned.

While vegetables are roasting, in a small bowl stir together half the ricotta, 1 cup Monterey Jack, cumin, and salt and pepper to taste. Drain salsa for 30 seconds into a fine sieve set over a bowl

(do not press on solids); transfer to another bowl.

Trim tortillas with scissors into six 5x3¾-inch rectangles. Arrange two rectangles in bottom of loaf pan, then add half of zucchini, half of peppers, half of corn, and 1 tablespoon cilantro. Repeat layering with tortilla rectangles, ¼ cup salsa, remaining ricotta, remaining vegetables and 1 tablespoon cilantro in same manner. Top with remaining tortilla rectangles, salsa, Monterey Jack and cilantro. Cover lasagna with foil, bake in middle of oven 12 minutes or until heated through and cheese is melted. Let lasagna stand covered 5 minutes before serving.

Cut lasagna in half, serve with lime wedges. Serves 2 as a meal.

Note: You may use whole wheat tortillas or low-carb wheat tortillas instead.

Serving size: ½ of recipe. Per serving: 613 calories, 31 g protein, 29 g fat, 65 g carbohydrates, 1,103 mg sodium, 78 mg cholesterol

PRUE NICHOLAS*Central Texas Electric Cooperative***VEGGIE MEDLEY RED BEANS-N-RICE**

- 1 pound dried red beans
- 1 large purple onion
- 2 red or yellow bell peppers
- 2 zucchini
- 1 large yellow squash
- 1 carrot
- ½ teaspoons minced garlic
- 2 stalks celery, sliced
- 7 cups water
- 4 tablespoons Creole seasoning
- Hot rice or thick bread slices
- Smoked sausage, optional

Wash and sort beans. Place beans in slow cooker. Put next five ingredients in food processor and purée until smooth. Pour puréed veggies with juices into slow cooker. (Don't put your face too close to the mix; it's quite pungent.) Add garlic, celery, water and seasoning. Add sausage if you want meat, though straight veggie is fantastic. Cook on low 8 to 10 hours. Serves 6 to 8 over rice or with bread as a meal.

Serving size: 1½ cups. Per serving: 232 calories, 15 g protein, 1 g fat, 44 g carbohydrates, 357 mg sodium, 0 mg cholesterol

ALLISON ANNE CAVANAUGH*Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative***RECIPE CONTEST**

I'm always looking for a way to streamline the hectic weekday dinner. One way is to make simple recipes with few ingredients. For our January contest, send in your best **FIVE-INGREDIENT MEALS** to Home Cooking, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704. You may also fax them to (512) 486-6254 or e-mail them to recipes@texas-ec.org. Please include your name, address and phone number, as well as the name of your electric co-op. The deadline is January 10. The top winner will receive a tin filled with Pioneer products. Runners-up will also receive a prize.

