

apple dumplings

Quick and delicious! This is like having your own individual apple pie. My nephew Bret loves these served warm for breakfast. SERVES 8

2 Granny Smith apples

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

1 cup water

Peel, core, and slice the apples vertically into 8 slices each. Cover with water to keep the slices from turning brown.

1 cup sugar

½ cup (1 stick) butter

¼ teaspoon vanilla extract

In a medium saucepan, mix the water, ¾ cup of the sugar, the butter, and the vanilla. Bring the sugar mixture to a boil over medium heat.

8 canned buttermilk biscuits

4 teaspoons ground cinnamon

Separate each biscuit into 2 layers. Wrap a biscuit layer around a slice of apple, stretching the biscuit slightly to overlap, and seal on the bottom. Place the wrapped slices, sealed side down, in a 9 × 12 × 2-inch casserole dish. Pour the hot sugar mixture over the apple slices. Mix the remaining ¼ cup sugar with the cinnamon and sprinkle the mixture over the tops of the wrapped apples. Bake for 35 minutes, or until golden brown.

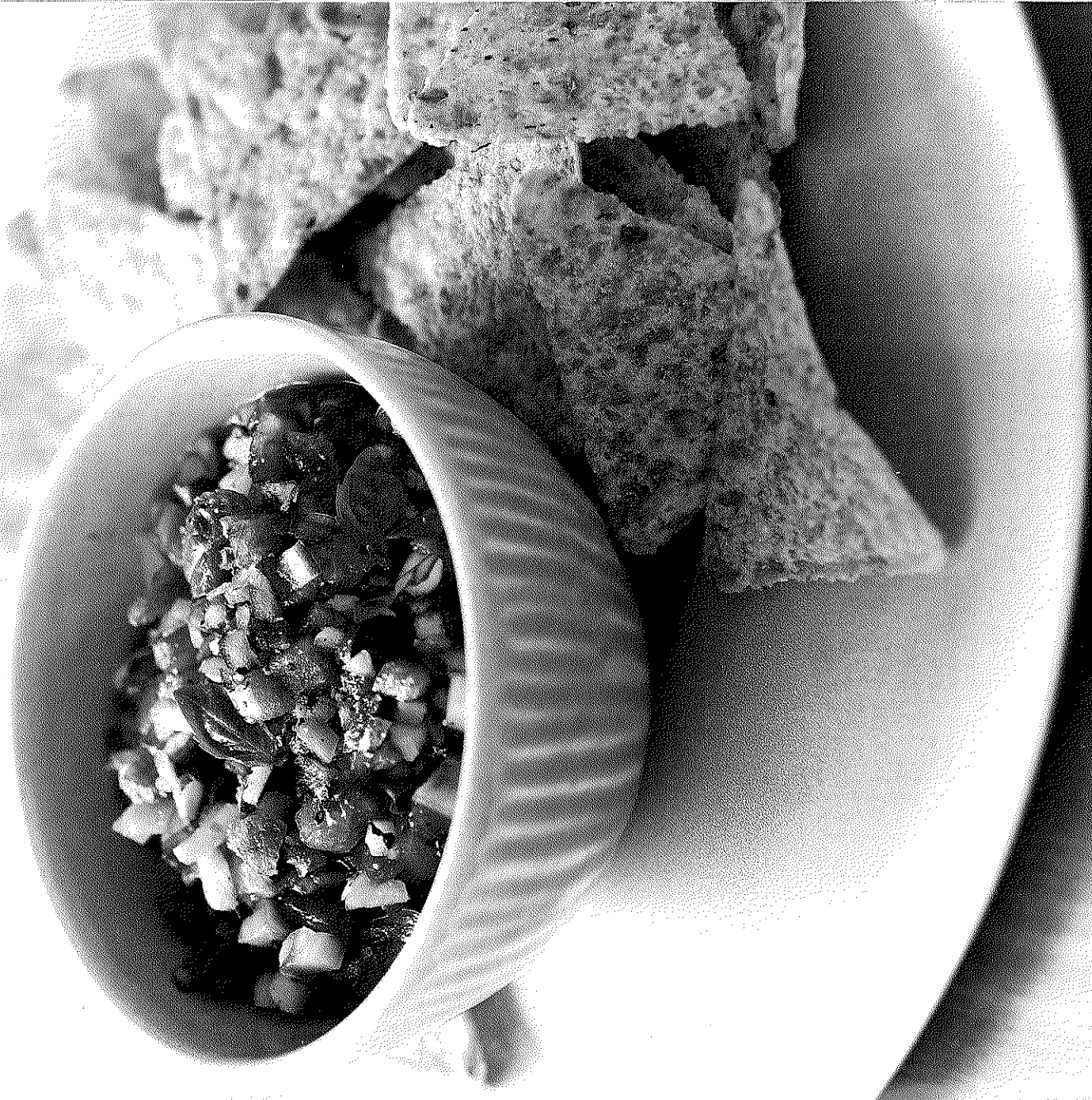


watermelon salsa

Who says you need tomatoes to make salsa? Phyllis Pritchett of Martin, Tennessee, shared this recipe for a delicious summer salsa made with watermelon! This seemingly odd mix of ingredients makes an amazing appetizer. Add any fruit you like. I add diced mango sometimes for color and flavor. **MAKES 3 CUPS**

1/2 teaspoons lime zest
(from about 1 lime)
1/4 cup fresh lime juice
(from about 3 limes)
1 tablespoon sugar
3/4 teaspoon pepper
3 cups seeded and finely
chopped watermelon
1 cucumber, peeled,
seeded, and diced
1 jalapeño pepper,
seeded and minced
1 small red onion,
finely chopped
8 fresh basil leaves,
finely chopped
1/2 teaspoon garlic salt
Tortilla or pita chips

*I like it spicy, so I use
2 jalapeños instead of 1!*



charleston cheese dip

Cheese seems to be a staple in many southern dishes. I was on tour a few years ago and had a show in Charleston. When I got to my hotel room, the staff had left me a lovely basket of goodies. Usually, amenities baskets are full of things like fruit and candy. This basket was accompanied by a tray of homemade cheese dip and crackers. It was perfect for this Georgia gal! **SERVES 10**

½ cup mayonnaise

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

**1 8-ounce package cream
cheese, softened**

In a medium bowl, mix the mayonnaise, cream cheese, Cheddar

**1 cup grated sharp Cheddar
cheese (about 4 ounces)**

cheese, Monterey Jack cheese, green onions, and cayenne pepper.

**½ cup grated Monterey Jack
cheese (about 2 ounces)**

Transfer the mixture to a shallow baking dish, such as a 9-inch pie pan. Top the mixture with the cracker crumbs and bake for 15 minutes, or until heated through. Remove the pan from the

oven and top with the bacon. Serve immediately with corn chips, crackers, or bagel chips.

2 green onions, finely chopped

Dash of cayenne pepper

**8 Ritz or butter crackers,
crushed**

**8 slices bacon, cooked and
crumbled**



rainy day chicken and rice soup

Everybody craves soup on cold, wintry days. I love this rainy-day soup, even in the summer. Most soups have rice, potatoes, or pasta, but rarely all three. Maybe we should nickname this "exercise" soup since it's loaded with carbohydrates. I like to have a big bowl of this over cornbread, then take a nap, but that's just me. **SERVES 8**

4 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves
5 chicken bouillon cubes
1 small onion, finely chopped
2 tablespoons dried parsley
1/2 teaspoon pepper
8 cups water
6 carrots, peeled and sliced
4 medium potatoes, peeled and cubed
6 ounces fettuccine noodles
1 12-ounce brick American cheese, cubed (about 3 cups)
3/4 cup instant rice, uncooked

In a large stockpot, boil the chicken, bouillon cubes, onion, parsley, and pepper in the water until fully cooked, about 30 minutes. Remove the chicken from the broth and strain the broth into a large bowl. Discard the onion mixture. Allow the chicken to cool. Cut into cubes.

Measure the broth and add enough water to make 8 cups of liquid in the large stockpot. Bring the broth to a boil. Add the carrots and potatoes, and cook for 20 minutes, or until the potatoes are done. Add the noodles and cook for 10 minutes more. Remove the pot from the heat and add the cheese and rice. Stir the mixture and let it stand for 10 minutes before serving.

tennessee jambalaya

This hearty kielbasa sausage stew comes from Beth's Tennessee pal Colleen Gates. Cajun jambalaya recipes call for any meat that walks, crawls, swims, or flies! We decided this dish is the Tennessee version of Louisiana jambalaya, sans seafood! Serve over rice. **SERVES 6**

4 slices bacon
1 to 1 1/2 pounds kielbasa sausage, thinly sliced
1 1/2 teaspoons onion powder
2 15.5-ounce cans black beans with juice
2 8-ounce cans tomato sauce
1 4-ounce can green chiles
2 medium carrots, shredded
1/2 teaspoon Italian seasoning
1/8 teaspoon pepper

In a large stockpot, cook the bacon until crisp and set aside. Cook the sausage in the bacon drippings until lightly browned. Stir in the onion powder, black beans, tomato sauce, chiles, carrots, and seasonings. Bring the stew to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer, covered, for 45 minutes. Stir occasionally. Crumble the bacon and sprinkle on top of the stew before serving. Serve over rice.

chicken poppy seed salad

Everybody loves the basic, tried-and-true chicken salad recipe that I make, but I had this chunky chicken salad at the Paulk family reunion in Willacoochee, Georgia, this past spring and I fell in love with it. The recipe comes from Lindsey Rundorff, who is the great-granddaughter of my great-aunt Cora Paulk, my mama's aunt. Draw that one on your family tree! Aunt Cora was all of four feet eleven inches tall, one of the sweetest ladies you could ever know, and a real pistol. She lived to be ninety-six years old. She'd be tickled pink to know she ended up in a cookbook! **SERVES 12**

2½ pounds boneless,
skinless chicken breasts
4 celery stalks, finely chopped
4 cups seedless grapes, halved
2 cups slivered almonds
2 cups mayonnaise
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
2 tablespoons poppy seeds
2 tablespoons dried dill

Boil the chicken in a large pot filled with water until done, about 45 minutes. Drain the chicken and set aside to cool. Once the chicken is cooled, dice into small pieces and place in a large mixing bowl. Add the celery, grapes, almonds, mayonnaise, salt, pepper, poppy seeds, and dill. Mix until the salad is fully combined. Store in the refrigerator.

*I add mandarin oranges if I have them
in the pantry, just for fun.*



chicken pizza

After discovering a delicious chicken pizza on a family beach trip, we decided to create it at home. We love this recipe because it's so different from traditional pizza—not a tomato in sight. Now we can all enjoy it more than once a year! SERVES 12 TO 14

2 13.8-ounce cans premade
pizza crust dough

4 tablespoons olive oil

2 teaspoons minced garlic

2 cups shredded mozzarella
cheese (about 8 ounces)

2 cups shredded Cheddar
cheese (about 8 ounces)

1 bell pepper, cored, seeded,
and cut into strips

1 red onion, sliced vertically

3 boneless, skinless chicken
breast halves, grilled
and diced

6 slices bacon, cooked until
crisp and crumbled

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Roll the pizza dough out and fit onto two 15-inch pizza pans.

Drizzle 1 tablespoon of olive oil and 1 teaspoon of garlic on each pizza crust, followed by ½ cup each of the mozzarella cheese and ½ cup of the Cheddar cheese. Scatter half of the bell pepper,

sliced onion, chicken, and bacon on top of the cheeses. Sprinkle another ½ cup mozzarella cheese and ½ cup Cheddar cheese over each pizza and drizzle each pizza with 1 tablespoon more of olive oil. Bake the pizzas for 20 to 25 minutes, or until the crusts are lightly browned. Slice each pizza into 8 pieces.

Pizza doesn't have to be round! I make this pizza dough into a rectangle and cut it into squares to serve.



broccoli casserole

My mama was a schoolteacher for twenty-five years. She even taught me in the third grade! My best friend in elementary school was Julie Perry. Julie's mom taught the second grade, and Julie had already had her mom as a teacher, so she showed me the ropes. People always ask me if it was weird having my mama for a teacher and I always say yes. I never knew whether to call her "Miss Yearwood" or "Mama"! Julie and I were friends from the first grade all the way through high school graduation. We spent lots of time at each other's homes, working on school projects or having "spend the night" parties. I ate a lot of meals at Mr. Edwin and "Miss" Julianne's house. This recipe came from Mrs. Perry.

SERVES 8 TO 10

2 10-ounce packages frozen
chopped broccoli,
or 1 pound fresh broccoli
florets
2 large eggs, beaten
1 cup mayonnaise
1 10-ounce can cream of
mushroom soup
4 tablespoons grated sweet
onion
10 ounces sharp Cheddar
cheese, grated
(about 2½ cups)

Salt and pepper

½ cup bread crumbs, crushed
regular potato chips, or
cheese cracker crumbs

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 9 × 13 × 2-inch casserole dish.

Cook the broccoli in water, drain, and set aside to cool.

In a large bowl, combine the broccoli, eggs, mayonnaise, soup, onion, and 2 cups of the grated cheese. Add salt and pepper and put into the prepared casserole dish. Bake for 30 minutes.

Remove the casserole from the oven and sprinkle the surface with the cracker crumbs. Top with the remaining cheese. Return to the oven and bake until the crumbs brown slightly and the cheese melts, about 10 minutes.



squash casserole

My sister, Beth, was always the squash eater in our family. Just the thought of the yellow stringy stuff could send me from the table. This is the recipe that changed it all for me. I have Garth to thank because he loves squash casserole, so I went in search of a recipe. Beth shared this one with me (of course). I tasted it just to be nice, and never looked back.

I am now officially a squash eater! **SERVES 8**

2 pounds yellow summer
squash, trimmed and
sliced 1/4 inch thick

1/2 small sweet onion, such as
Vidalia, peeled and diced

1 teaspoon salt
1 large egg

1/2 cup mayonnaise
1/2 cup grated Cheddar cheese
(about 2 ounces)

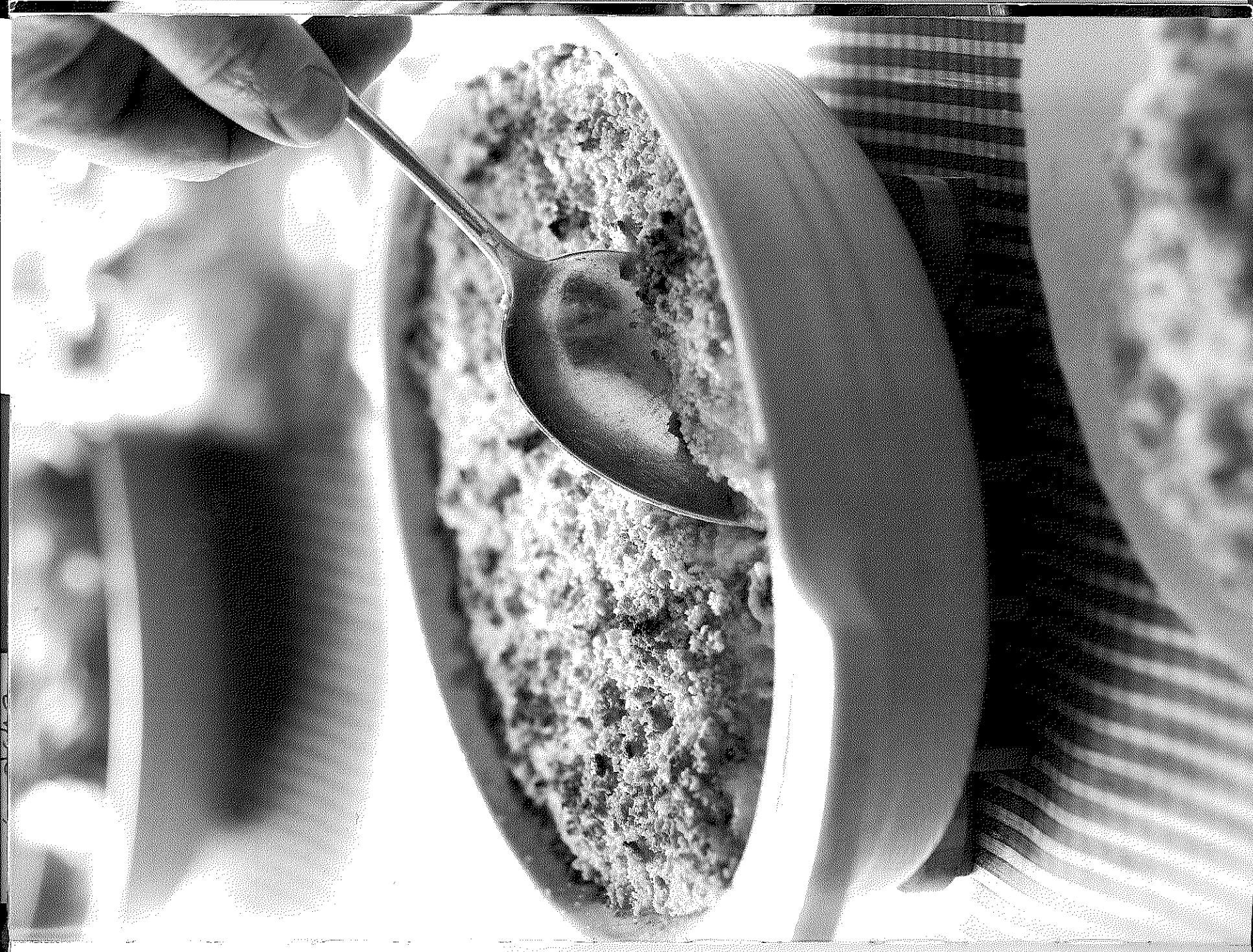
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
1/2 cup butter crackers,
such as Ritz, crushed
(about 12 crackers)

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 2-quart casserole dish.

Place the sliced squash and the onion in a medium saucepan with about a cup of water and 1/2 teaspoon of the salt. Cover and cook over medium until the squash is tender, about 15 minutes. Drain and cool.

Put the squash into a bowl and beat with an electric mixer; the mixture should remain kind of chunky. Add the egg, mayonnaise, cheese, remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt, and the pepper and mix until combined. Pour the squash mixture into the prepared dish, top with the crumbs, and bake for 30 minutes.

The natural moisture content of a squash varies with the variety and with growing conditions. Choose a yellow straight or crookneck summer squash, and drain the cooked squash thoroughly before combining it with the other ingredients.



crockpot macaroni and cheese

There are a lot of recipes in this book that I cook every week. This is a dish that I would make every day, but I rarely do because I simply can't be alone with it! I love macaroni and cheese, and this recipe is the bomb. After the time is up, and you open the crockpot lid for the first time to see the cheese and butter just bubbling on the top, you will fall in love. Be prepared to eat the entire dish—and don't say I didn't warn you! SERVES 12

8 ounces elbow macaroni,
cooked

1 12-ounce can evaporated milk

1½ cups whole milk

2 large eggs, beaten

¼ cup (½ stick) butter, melted

1 teaspoon salt

Dash of pepper

2 10-ounce bricks sharp

Cheddar cheese, grated
(about 5 cups)

Dash of paprika

In a large 4-quart crockpot sprayed with cooking spray, mix the macaroni, milks, eggs, butter, salt, pepper, and all but ½ cup of the grated cheese. Sprinkle the reserved cheese over the top of the mixture and then sprinkle with paprika. Cook on low heat for 3 hours and 15 minutes. Turn off the crockpot, stir the mixture, and serve hot.

If you don't have a crockpot, grease a 9x13x2-inch pan with butter, add the mixture, and bake at 350°F for 50 minutes.

lizzie's strawberry cake

I always think homemade has to mean strictly from scratch, so I tried every way I could think of to make this strawberry cake without using a cake mix! I even used a homemade white cake in place of the mix. It tasted good, but not any better than this recipe. When I found my grandmother Lizzie Paulk's original recipe from the 1930s, and saw it had a cake mix in it, I thought to myself, "Well, that makes it okay!" If you love strawberries as much as I do, you're in for a real treat. **SERVES 12**

CAKE

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Spray a 9 × 13 × 2-inch baking pan with cooking spray.

1 standard box plain white cake mix

1 3-ounce box strawberry-flavored gelatin

2/3 cup vegetable oil

1/2 cup frozen sliced strawberries in syrup, thawed

1/2 cup water

4 large eggs

With an electric mixer, beat the cake mix, gelatin, oil, strawberries, and water until fully combined. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and gently smooth the top. Bake for 40 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center of the cake comes out clean. Let cool in the pan.

In a blender or food processor, puree the butter, sugar, and strawberries for the glaze until smooth. Poke holes in the cake with a toothpick, then pour the icing over the cake, allowing some of it to seep into the cake. The more strawberry syrup you add, the thinner your icing will become. Store this cake, covered, in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

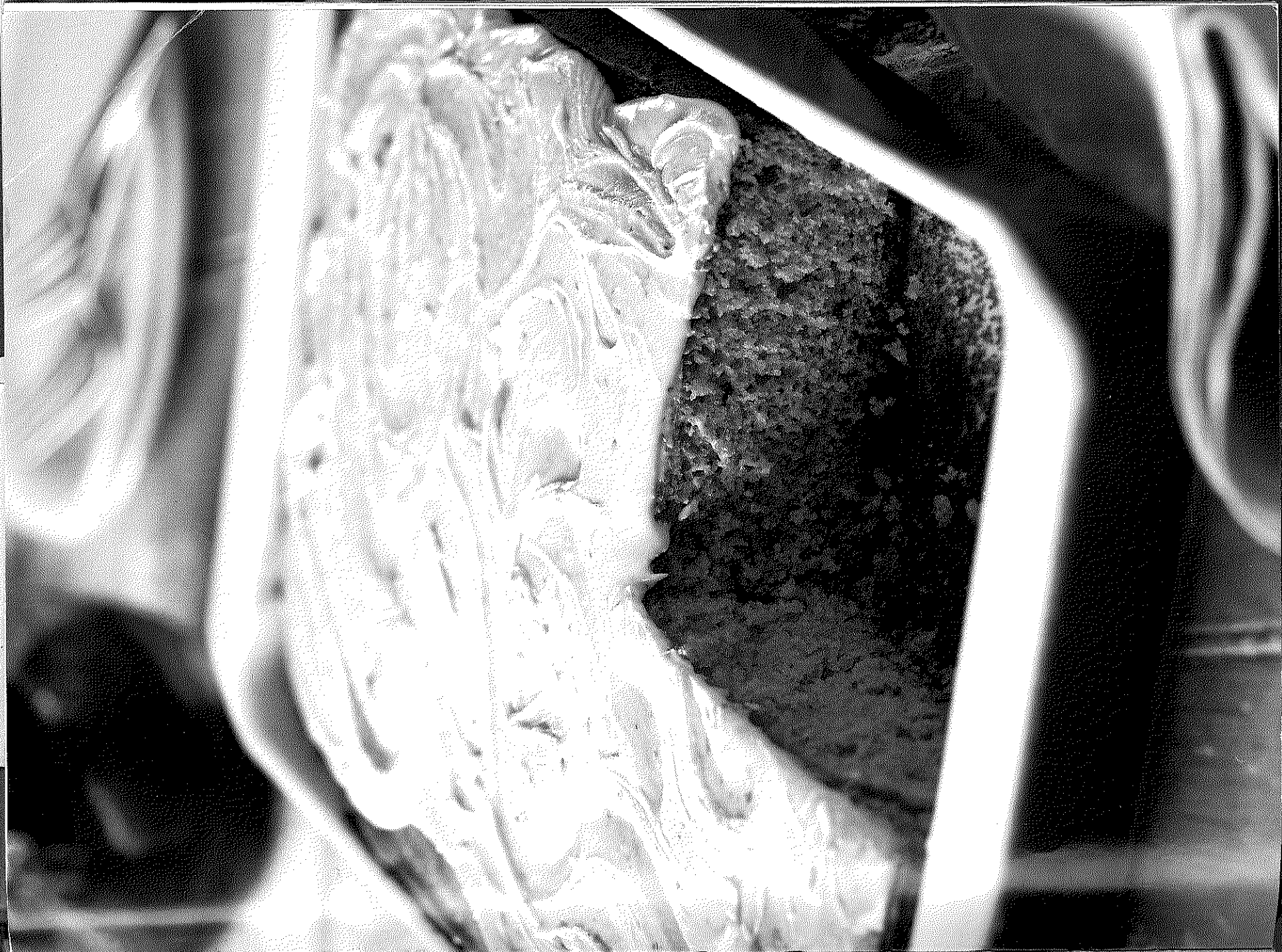
ICING

1/2 cup (1 stick) butter, room temperature

1 cup confectioners' sugar

1 cup frozen sliced strawberries in syrup, thawed

Serve this cake right out of the pan!



crockpot chocolate candy

My cousin Donna Paulk is a great cook. She's kindly given us several great recipes for this collection, including chicken soup, macaroni and cheese, beignets, and this candy. I love this kind of recipe: the candies look so pretty and appear really hard to make. People will think you're a genius cook, which is almost embarrassing considering how easy they are to make. Just layer everything in the cooker and wait! **MAKES 30 TO 40 PIECES**

**2 pounds (36 ounces) salted
dry-roasted peanuts**

Put the peanuts in the bottom of a 4-quart slow cooker. Layer the chocolate over the peanuts, beginning with the sweet chocolate, followed by the chocolate chips, and then the almond bark. Set the temperature on low and cook for 3 hours. Do not stir the mixture.

**4 ounces (4 squares) German's
sweet chocolate**

**1 12-ounce package semisweet
chocolate chips
(about 2 cups)**

2½ pounds white almond bark

After 3 hours, stir the mixture with a wooden spoon until smooth. Drop the candy into cupcake pan liners using about 2 tablespoons per liner. Allow the candy to cool completely before removing the cupcake liners.

FROM BETH: This is a fun recipe to make with your children. They can put everything in the slow cooker, and drop the candy into the cupcake liners, too.

If you can't find almond bark, substitute white chocolate chips.



sweet and saltines

After a meal, my mama will always say, "I need a little something sweet." If she has dessert, she will inevitably follow it up with, "Now I need a little something salty." It's become a joke at our house. These crackers are so good, you will just keep eating them, and Mama has her sweet and salty thing covered. Beware, they're really addictive.

SERVES 20

- 40 saltine crackers
- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 8 ounces semisweet chocolate chips (about 1 1/3 cups)

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Line a large jellyroll pan with aluminum foil and the saltine crackers.

In a medium saucepan, melt the butter and brown sugar together and bring to a boil. Boil for 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and pour over the crackers, covering them evenly. Put the jellyroll pan into the oven and watch closely. Bake for 4 to 5 minutes, or until just bubbly. Remove from the oven and pour the chocolate chips over the crackers. When the chips melt a bit, spread them over the crackers with a knife. Transfer the pan to the freezer for 15 to 20 minutes, or until completely cold. They will form one big sheet. Break up into pieces. Store in an airtight container.



FROM GWEN: Use anywhere from 35 to 45 saltine crackers, depending on the size of your pan.

FROM BETH: I used milk chocolate chips instead of semisweet once because that's what I had on hand. They tasted great, too.

Substitute graham crackers for the saltines for a sweeter snack. Use 1 stick of butter instead of 2 for a crunchier, saltier cracker.