

How I Started Cooking From Scratch

Cooking from scratch isn't something that many people know how to do these days. Most people open a box or can, add some water (or ingredients from another box/can), heat and eat. It can be a struggle, even intimidating, to think about learning how to take whole foods and make them a meal.



Before I launch into how I taught myself cooking from scratch, a little history first. My brother and I were raised by a single working mother. We also lived on an island in rural Alaska. That means that milk is *only* for cereal in the morning, fresh veggies and especially fruit weren't always available (too expensive), and just about all of our food came from a box or can.

I don't fault my mother one little bit for it, nor do I want to paint a picture that isn't true. Yes, I knew about making a potato salad from scratch, or a scratch gravy from the meat drippings. I made cookies from scratch, jams, and would help my grandma with her a-maz-ing dinner rolls. I can't blame my

mom one little bit for preferring to pop open a can of raviolli, so she could go sit down. Not one little bit! I just ended up growing up on hamburger helper and canned corn/green beans/carrots instead of home cooked meals.

Fast forward to today. If you look in our cupboards, you see far less canned or boxed food than the normal household has. We [said goodbye to the cans and boxes](#) and continue to do so bit by bit as we increase our skill sets and our tastes change.

I used to joke that I would starve inside of a health food store. I had almost no idea on what I could make with the stuff in there and wouldn't have been able to identify 80% of the stock. This is not a joke. I see videos of kids who live in the city that don't know what an eggplant or broccoli looks like so it's not too much of a stretch to believe that there are people out there who would be the same inside a whole foods or health food store. Cooking from scratch seemed 'hard' and it was a little intimidating. There's a stigma out there about people who cook from scratch: They're food snobs, crunchy granola hippies, or uppity-ups who refuse to eat anything other than gluten-free, soy free, 100% vegan/paleo/whateverdietisthecurrentfad types. I certainly don't fit into any of those categories.

The category I fit into is more of a person wanting to have more control over their food. I want to know how to make things from scratch for several reasons beyond that, too. I'm an overweight, middle aged woman who was raised on hamburger helper and canned corn. I'm not trying to go 'all healthy' but I do want to have better food that isn't filled with chemicals that make it last for a hundred years (sarcasm). I had almost zero idea on how to actually start cooking from scratch. Sure, I could buy one of the thousands of cook books out there but to be honest, I wouldn't make even half of the recipes in there. I have the adult version of 'picky eater' syndrome.

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In the end, it was pretty darn easy. The same way I got started with growing food is the strategy I used to tackle this long term goal: I started with the things I really loved. In the end, isn't the answer usually the most simple one possible?

When I was trying to figure out what food to grow, because let's face it: there are *a lot* of things you can grow to eat, I decided to keep it limited to the veggies that we ate all the time. I focused on the staples: taters, onions, green beans, carrots, peas, strawberries, garlic, and some greens. That's a healthy list of things to grow!

So when it came to cooking from scratch, I started with things we love and eat regularly. [Crackers](#), for example, is one of the first things I learned to make for several reasons. The first, of course, is we love to eat crackers with soups and stews or just to munch on. The other reasons included simplicity, limited money wasted on botched attempts, and it was something very quick to make, too. I can whip up a batch of crackers in 20 minutes total and tailor the flavor to whatever I'm making them for. A dash of garlic powder here, a touch of oregano there, salt or pepper or whatever your little heart desires with just a twitch of the wrist! Of course, my first forays into cracker making took a lot longer than 20 minutes. I am still amazed at how much you really get out of a single cup of flour, too!

It was an easy step to go on to [making tortillas](#). I cringed every time I bought tortillas – I mean it's just flour or corn meal, some water, and maybe vegetable oil or lard! Does it *really* make sense to be paying \$0.71 *per taco sized flour tortilla*?! I think not, especially when they are also quickly made at home and you end up using less than a dollar's worth of flour and other ingredients. Plus, you can tailor those to whatever you want to put inside of them, too.

Moving on from there, I turned my attention to those beloved heat-and-eat meals. Those oh-so-wonderful vans of food that you could, if you wanted, just pop open and start eating. The heat is just a bonus. Well, by the time I got to this phase, I was already a [confident canner](#) and ready to start doing more than single ingredient canning. I wanted something that would make people say, "WOW!"

That's when I started making my meals-in-a-jar. These are a culmination of several lifestyle changes made over the years. We [only buy meat twice a year](#) and then can whatever nears the one year mark in the freezer. This time, I thawed out the stew meat to be used in meals instead of just [canning jars of meat](#) alone. Don't get me wrong, I absolutely love my home canned meat – they make for some very fast meals, too. Like I said, I wanted something that would give the "Wow!" factor.

I tried several different things before I ended up going with the most simple system in the end. My [meals-in-a-jar](#) are a big hit! My husband takes some when he goes hunting, we keep a couple in the emergency vehicle bag (2 pint size only, the weight is a factor but those jars are valuable in an emergency situation, too), and I keep a couple at work on the shelf. That's one of the things that I would say I am highly proud of: My own ready to eat (heated or not!) jars of food made with whole ingredients. I know what's in it, even how the vegetables were grown, and how it was processed. They are shelf stable for a good 2 years and don't need refrigeration.

Overall, cooking from scratch doesn't have to be complicated and definitely doesn't have to be fancy. I have learned an ageless lesson when it comes to cooking: simple is always better. If you want to take the plunge and learn how to make some things from scratch, if not going all out and doing as much as you can yourself, choose one thing you really love and then learn how to make it. If it's something expensive, even better! Food tends to be less expensive when you make it yourself and on those occasions that it isn't, at least you know with

certainty that what you're eating is real food. Not chemicals!

Scratch Cooking Recipes

[Crackers](#)

[4 Different Meals from One Roast/Pork Loin](#)

[Meals in a Jar](#) (Requires Pressure Canner)

[Homemade Tortillas](#)

[Jams and Jellies](#)

[Make 5 Foods With 5 Ingredients](#)

BONUS

[Make Your Food Stretch and Cut the Waste!](#)