

Several years ago, I decided to make cooking a bit of a challenge and possibly even more fun than usual. I like to cook, so it was not a stretch to give myself some rules to follow and see if I could fulfill the expectations I had put upon myself.

For the month of January that year, I decided I would serve a main dish soup every day. An additional rule would require that the primary ingredients of each soup would be what we had grown or raised.

I didn't really think this would be very difficult, but as the month progressed, it seemed that it was becoming hard to come up with recipes that were delicious, nourishing, and different. I suspect much of the problem was that I was becoming tired of cooking soup.

But, I persevered, and did manage soup as a main meal every day. And, of course, I had picked a month with 31 days.

The first week was easy. We had chicken soup with vegetables, chili with pork, squash soup, and beef vegetable soup. On January 5th, we had a vegetarian "Red Soup" made of red cabbage, red onions, beets, and some herbs. We followed that the next day with plain old potato soup, one of my favorites and consisting of just three ingredients plus seasonings. Potatoes, onions, and a lump of butter make a satisfying soup. On the last day of that first week, I made French onion soup, one of Runo's favorites.

As the month went on, I grew either more creative or more desperate. One day, Steak and Potato Soup was on the menu, and I hesitated to admit that I had sliced up beef tenderloin for soup. On another day we had an easy soup—home canned beef and broth with homemade noodles. By the last day of the month, my mind had refused to consider another new soup recipe. So, we had "soup on a nail," the Swedish equivalent of "stone soup." In this case, I cut the vegetables in "nails," and that is all it was—potato, carrot, shallot, onion, garlic, and salt and water. And it was good.

Since that experiment was a success—at least, we didn't starve that first month of 2012—I repeated it the following month with potato dishes. Potatoes are probably my favorite food, so I didn't think it would be hard. And, it wasn't, at least not until the experiment seemed to end before the month did. Eight years is too long for the details to remain accessible to my conscious memory, but, for some reason, there are no entries in the soup book beyond February 20th. I might be able to look back into the general journal I kept for relevant information, but it is probably best left in the mists of the past.

Going back to that old notebook full of potato recipes wasn't such a bad idea, anyway. We have plenty of home grown potatoes, and there are many, many ways to use them. So, looking at these entries for the first twenty days of February might give me some ideas for October this year. *Rotmos* is definitely on the menu this fall. It is a mixture of mashed potatoes and mashed rutabaga with plenty of melted butter. We raised some nice rutabagas this year, much nicer than usual, so that dish will certainly be on the table this fall.

And, some day soon I will make Norwegian potato *lefse*, another of our favorites. I don't have the expertise in making them that would ensure the prettiest of flat breads, but they always taste good.

Giving myself a cooking or baking challenge is an incentive to look for new recipes or investigate old cookbooks for recipes of the past. With the same foods on our tables week after week and year after year—at least, if we are trying to eat what we grow ourselves—meals could become boring. A little ingenuity and sometimes a trick or two will revive both the meals and the cook.