

Put Me In, Coach: Hit a Savings Home Run With Recipe Substitutions

When my husband and I were first married, cooking was a hobby. We followed recipes in fancy cookbooks and shopped at swanky specialty (read: expensive) stores for the finest gourmet ingredients. Then, we had kids, and our high-priced food addiction had to change.

I was a great cook, but only when I had a recipe to follow. If I veered from the clearly written instructions, it was disaster! Or so I thought. I had an epiphany one afternoon while scouring cookbooks looking for a recipe to match the ingredients I had on hand. Big surprise, nothing fit.

My in-laws were coming for dinner in an hour and I had no chance to get to the store and no money to buy anything. I wanted to make cornbread to accompany the chili I had on hand in the freezer, but my refrigerator lacked the key ingredients of eggs and cornmeal. In that moment, I decided to make substitutions to the recipe (gasp!).

My first stop was the Internet. I searched for food substitutions and found a wealth of possibilities. I learned to replace eggs with applesauce. I had corn grits in my pantry that would replace plain old cornmeal. I just told my mother-in-law I'd crafted "rustic apple" cornbread. She was delighted and dinner was a success!

That snap decision has forever changed the way I think about recipes and cooking. I realized I could save loads of money by using what I have on hand in my pantry to create my own unique and fresh recipes. The possibilities are limitless. Here are some favorites:

- Eggs (baking) – applesauce, mashed banana, yogurt.
- Eggs (cooking) – mayonnaise.
- Ketchup – 1 cup = 1 cup tomato sauce, 1 tsp. vinegar and 1 Tbs. sugar
- Prepared Mustard – 1 Tablespoon = 1 Tbs. dried mustard, 1 tsp. water, 1 tsp. vinegar , 1 tsp. sugar.
- Hot Sauce – Three-quarters tsp. cayenne pepper and 1 tsp. vinegar.
- Red Wine – Beef broth, apple cider, vinegar, or just plain water.
- Milk – Thinned out yogurt, water, cream, half-and-half.
- Buttermilk – One cup of milk plus 1 Tbs. of lemon juice or apple cider vinegar. Let it sit for five minutes after mixing.
- Sour Cream – Plain yogurt, drain water off in a sieve.
- Soy Sauce – Kosher salt and granulated sugar dissolved in hot water.
- Vinegar – Lemon and lime juice or white wine.
- Bread Crumbs – Cracker crumbs, oatmeal, or matzo meal.
- Cottage Cheese – Farmer's cheese or ricotta cheese.
- White Sugar – Brown sugar, confectioner's sugar, honey or corn syrup.
- Jam – Canned fruit drained and mashed.
- Baking Soda – Baking powder but triple the amount.
- Molasses – Three-quarters cup of brown sugar and 1 tsp. cream of tartar (per cup of molasses).
- Mozzarella – For pizza or lasagna, jack cheese and Parmesan.
- Pepperoni – Salami.
- Allspice – Half tsp. cinnamon, quarter tsp. ginger, and quarter tsp. cloves (per teaspoon of allspice).
- Beef or Chicken Broth – Bouillon mixed with 1 cup of boiling water or vegetable broth.
- Butter – Margarine, shortening or lard.
- Unsweetened Chocolate – 3 Tbs. unsweetened cocoa plus 1 Tbs. shortening or vegetable oil.

Now I save money and also create my own recipe that, believe it or not, is often better than the gourmet original. Results will vary, but have fun experimenting and find your inner chef!

*This has been a guest post by Mary Jo from Denver, CO
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