

MAKING FAMILY DINNER NEW FOR THE NEW YEAR



Food

In honor of MLK Day, try this easy homestyle pork chop recipe from the America's Sunday Suppers cookbook, via our friends at Points of Light.



Fun

Get everyone in the spirit of trying new things with a game of "Guess the Ingredient!"



Conversation

Honor MLK Day with these conversation starters about civil rights and equality.



With the dropping of the famed ball in Times Square at midnight on January 1, many of us vow to do things differently in the next 12 months. We all tend to look at the New Year as a time of fresh opportunity, when we set goals for self-improvement or resolve to change our ways for the better.

Your determination to start the New Year off on the right foot may not have anything to do with family dinners, but it's the perfect time to take a quick look at your routine and see if there's any way to make the comfortable old family dinner new and fresh. Try these tips to reinvent your family dinners in 2017:

CHANGE YOUR MENUS

Make a commitment to try one new food each week as a family. You might decide that you'll cook a whole new recipe every week, or just start with finding one new item -- such as an unfamiliar fruit or vegetable -- to work into your familiar menus. Make it extra fun and engaging for everyone by passing around "rating cards" and letting everyone at the table fill in their reactions to the new flavors!

Have reluctant eaters? Search our Picky Eater archives for tips.

thefamilydinnerproject.org/food-for-thought/thats-disgusting-encouraging-picky-eaters-2

TACKLE IT WITH TEAMWORK

Nothing puts you in a family dinner rut faster than being the sole person in charge of planning, shopping, cooking and cleaning up. Get everyone involved in the process by having family members submit menu ideas in a Suggestion Box or on a message board; sending older kids and teens on a grocery Scavenger Hunt to streamline shopping; and creating a rotation to help govern who's on cooking and clean-up duties. You can even have the kids make dinner one night a week -- even young ones can handle simple recipes like Baked Veggie Quesadillas or Homemade Pizza with adult supervision.

thefamilydinnerproject.org/food/baked-veggie-quesadillas/

thefamilydinnerproject.org/food/homemade-pizza-2

CHALLENGE YOURSELVES

Make sure there's a place at the table for fun! Playing a quick and easy game at the table whenever you sit down to dinner together is a great habit, but some families find that they get into a rut playing the same table games over and over again. Why not shake things up in the New Year with one day each week or month devoted to a family fun challenge? Try ideas like Family Iron Chef or Restaurant to put some excitement into dinnertime.

Iron Chef: Family Edition

Restaurant

thefamilydinnerproject.org/fun/iron-chef-family-edition
thefamilydinnerproject.org/fun/restaurant/

SET AN EXTRA PLACE

Our friend, author Sarah Smiley, famously invited different guests for dinner every week while her military husband was deployed. As the Smileys learned, having guests at the table can breathe new life into dinnertime and bring a new perspective to the meal! Try choosing one day each month when a different family member can invite a special guest to share your dinner, and try out activities like Interview and The Hat Game to get to know one another better in a fun and interesting way.

thefamilydinnerproject.org/tag/interview/
thefamilydinnerproject.org/fun/the-hat-game/

REAL FAMILY DINNER PROJECTS: THE LAZIO FAMILY

We met the Lazio family when they reached out to us in response to our profile of another family. As it turns out, the Lazios are friendly with the Nelsons, who were featured on TFDP in November 2016. Also avid fans of family dinners, the Lazios were eager to share their story.

THE FAMILY:

Shane and Barbie Lazio and kids Baylie (17) and Talon (15). The Lazios hail from Chula Vista, California.

THE GOAL:

Currently, Barbie says the family's biggest dinner-time goal is to find a way to gather all four family members, sit down together, and enjoy a meal while catching up on what's happening in the kids' lives. She and Shane are consciously working on scheduling meals around their teens' activities and social lives, but it's still a work in progress.

THE CHALLENGES:

Teenage schedules and needs are taking their toll on the Lazio dinner routine. Whereas the family once ate dinner together nearly every night, now that Baylie and Talon are older, their parents are finding it harder and harder to make time for that connection. In fact, Barbie says one of the reasons she reached out after seeing her friends the Nelsons featured on our site was that husband Shane was becoming increasingly upset by their inability to stick to regular family dinners as they had done when the kids were young.

THE STRATEGIES:

Like many stay-at-home moms we've met, Barbie still finds that she needs to plan very carefully and use her time efficiently to get dinner on the table

at a time that's convenient for everyone. Because so many activities happen around the dinnertime rush, she isn't able to be in the kitchen cooking during the late afternoon and evening hours, so the strategic use of slow cooker meals and planning ahead for leftovers helps ensure there's always a meal ready when the teens are.

THE FOOD:

The Lazio family loves steaks, especially ribeye, and really "anything on the grill," Barbie says. She and Shane also enjoy homemade tacos, while Baylie and Talon are more partial to spaghetti and meatballs.

THE BEST PART:

Faith is important to the Lazios, so the nightly dinnertime prayer is central to their enjoyment of their family meal. They make a habit of listing things they're grateful for during this time, as well as asking for blessings for themselves, family and friends. In addition to their prayer time, Barbie and Shane make a point of trying to stay caught up on what's happening with the kids' friends and educational pursuits, and Barbie says the whole family likes to spend their time at the table laughing together.



SEARED PORK CHOPS WITH TOMATO GRAVY



This recipe comes from Chef Anne Quatrano, via the America's Sunday Suppers guide from our friends at Points of Light. Anne suggests serving with biscuits or cornbread for a Southern-style meal, but you could also serve this with rice.



Instructions:

1. In a large skillet, render the bacon until it's crispy. Remove and reserve.
2. Brown the pork chops on both sides in the bacon grease.
3. Remove all but 1-2 tablespoons of grease from the skillet. Add the onions and sweat until they're translucent.
4. Add the tomatoes and juices. Season with salt, pepper and sugar.
5. Turn off the heat and add the reserved bacon back into the skillet.

Ingredients

- 1 quart (4 cups) canned tomatoes
- 6 pork chops
- 6 thick slices of bacon
- 1 sweet onion, diced in large squares
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- Salt and pepper to taste



GUESS THE INGREDIENT



Ask your diners to guess the ingredients in a new dish. Throw in an offbeat spice or flavor element into a meal with a dash of cinnamon, a splash of lime juice or a squirt of fish sauce. And don't be surprised if children are better at this game than the adults, since we lose half of our taste buds by age 20!



RECIPE FOR CONVERSATION

Talk About: Civil Rights and Equality



- 1 Is "fairness" the same as "justice?" Why or why not?
- 2 Rosa Parks said "you must never be fearful of what you are doing when it is right." Have you ever been afraid to do the right thing?
- 3 Talk about a person you admire, famous or otherwise, who has fought or fights for the freedom of others.
- 4 Have you ever seen someone else treated unkindly or unfairly by others because they looked different, spoke a different language, or came from a different culture? How did it make you feel?
- 5 Have you ever stood up for something you believed in, even if other people thought you were wrong? What did you do? Was it hard to stand up for your beliefs?

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