

SOLO

Suppers

Simple
Delicious
Meals
to Cook
for Yourself



JOYCE GOLDSTEIN

Photographs by Judi Swinks

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CHRONICLE BOOKS
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Introduction

Singles represent the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population. In 1940, 8 percent of all American households were made up of singles. Today, more people are living alone than are living in nuclear families. Married couples with children represent 23 percent of the population, while singles are 27 percent and increasing. People live alone for many different reasons: never married, divorced, widowed, left in the “empty nest” when the last of the kids moves out. They are on their own—no roommates, no mate—by choice or by fate. For the most part, they are happy and not lonely. They have friends and family and lead active lives.

Most cookbooks and magazines have not reflected this demographic shift. The average recipe is still designed to serve the nuclear family, with four to six portions. But if you cook for one, you know from frustrating experience that not every recipe reduces easily or well. After doing the math, you often find that there’s not enough seasoning or too little liquid. Even the timing may be off. A few cookbooks have been written for the single-person household, but, for the most part, they have been aimed at young singles with little real cooking and dining experience, and often on a tight budget. These books have been friendly and pragmatic, but largely lacking in culinary inspiration. In other words, they certainly wouldn’t send me into the kitchen.

There is a growing market of sophisticated single diners who have traveled extensively, dined out in all manner of restaurants, know how to cook, and love to eat well. I am one of those solo diners who doesn’t order takeout or cook frozen dinners. You could say I’m a snob, and that’s partly right, but the truth is that I know my way around a kitchen and still enjoy being there. Having been a cooking teacher for more than thirty-five years, a restaurant chef for sixteen years, and a single diner for ten years, I have the experience to be able to create delicious and well-thought-out recipes for singles and can offer a personal outlook on how to market for and plan meals with both panache and practicality.

Like many singles, I eat out once or twice a week, occasionally more, usually

with friends or business associates, rarely on my own (unless I am traveling). I entertain friends and members of my family about once a week. The rest of the time I eat at home by myself. I am spoiled. I want to eat as well at home as I did when I had a restaurant and ate in the back kitchen or when I cooked for my family every night and showered them with love, attention, and home-cooked meals they still yearn for even today. I want to eat as well as when I entertain friends at home (usually minus the dessert). I believe that I deserve a great meal, a glass of excellent wine, and the time to relax and enjoy my own company. Also, I love to cook.

Why call this book Solo Suppers and not Solo Meals?

Because the evening meal is when eating alone has the most meaning and impact. Eating breakfast without company is no big thing. Even when you live with others, breakfast is rarely a social occasion. You read the paper, grab a muffin or bagel and coffee, and realize that there's not much time to linger at table (except maybe on Sunday, when you can lounge in your bathrobe, with the New York Times in one hand, coffee cup in the other, enjoying a lovely morning that may extend to noon or later). Lunch more often than not occurs while you are working. You may eat at your desk or grab a bite near the office, and even if you work at home, it's unlikely that you'll stop to cook because there is too much to do. Again, weekends may be different, but most solo people I know run a zillion errands on Saturday, see friends Saturday night, and on Sunday see friends, family, or films. They might do some cooking on Sunday for the rest of the week, but it's a low-key social day and probably an early evening.

Now, I realize that some people believe that the obvious solution to cooking for one is a book of only fast and easy recipes. They assume that single diners want to get the mealtime over with as quickly as possible. What is implied in this assumption is that cooking for yourself and dining alone is so abhorrent that "cook fast, eat fast, and get it over with" should be the single's way of life. I agree that on many nights a fast and easy meal is just right. But for those of us who love good food, and cooking, there are also many nights when we enjoy spending a bit of time in the kitchen. We're in no rush, there's no pressing engagement. Home is where the heart is, along with the stomach, so it's an ideal time to cook and dine in a leisurely way.

Cooking solo can be both rewarding and creative. First, it allows you the luxury to experiment. You can try dishes that you are not yet ready to cook for others until you are sure the recipes are delicious and worth the effort. Also, while I love soups and stews, the experience of dining endlessly on leftovers can get old fast. I delight in fabulous one-shot dinners, with nary a crumb left

over. And I love getting multiple uses out of a basic ingredient. For example, if I cook beets as a vegetable one night, a few nights later I will use the balance in a salad. My meals are often simple, but never simple-minded. Occasionally I am extravagant and self-indulgent. Good for me! Remember that what might be expensive if ordered in a restaurant can be an incredible bargain when you are the chef at home.

Even shopping can be creative. I love wandering through the stalls at the farmers' market, letting the produce inspire my upcoming meals. I like to browse ethnic markets and specialty-food shops at home and abroad, seeking new ingredients to add to my basic pantry. I especially relish improvisational meals assembled from a few fresh ingredients and the backup of my well-stocked pantry. I also enjoy creating new dishes by seeing what's in my refrigerator and pantry and putting them together so they seem new and wonderful, even though some of the parts of the meal were eaten in a different way a few days earlier. Cooking like this can be a creative challenge; it's either a fast game of beat-the-clock or a slow process of both learning and enjoyment. Sometimes I'm in a hurry to catch a movie or go to a play with friends. Sometimes dinner is my play, and I love the adventure of seeing what I can come up with, given what I have on hand and my ability to recognize my true culinary desires for the evening.

Eating is ideally a social activity, best shared with others. But if no others are available, you still have to eat. Take the time to enjoy cooking for yourself and make your evening a pleasant one by reading, listening to music, thinking—whatever it takes for you to relax and appreciate the solitude. The reality for most singles is that while our days may be busy, our work fulfilling, our friends wonderful, and our family beloved and equally busy, we are at home alone many a night and need to eat. *Solo Suppers* is a book for those nights when you don't want to depend on mediocre takeout and can't face one more broiled chicken breast or the same soup for the fourth night in a row. It is a book for when you are alone and want a satisfying home-cooked meal. Of course, it's great to cook for others, too, and there is no reason why some of these recipes cannot be doubled to share with another person. But only if his or her company is as good as your own.

Shopping for One

Cooking for one is easy. Shopping for one is more challenging. In fact, it might be the most difficult part of cooking for yourself. I try to be careful not to let my eyes be bigger than my stomach or refrigerator. The produce at my local farmers' market is so seductive, I tend to get carried away. I hope that

the food I buy will last if I should have to go out unexpectedly, because I hate to have to perform a garbage-pail sacrifice, during which I ceaselessly berate myself for wasting food.

When I go to the market, I fall in love with food. I constantly need to remind myself about moderation. Only one basket of berries, please, even if they are three for \$4.50. How many kinds of tomatoes can I eat this week? I know they look great on the windowsill, but will I end up throwing away a few because they've spoiled? Reality planning and a modicum of self-discipline is required if you are to avoid waste and guilt.

Before I shop I try to remember to look at my calendar to see if I have time to market a few times during the week or if I must go once and plan for several meals simultaneously. Usually I take a quick inventory of what's in my refrigerator, opening those closed and unmarked containers and playing the mental game of use it or lose it. Inspired in part by the thought of using some of those leftovers, I may already have a few ideas of what I want to cook or eat, but more often than not I let what I see at the market determine my meals. If my mood changes and I no longer want turnips or kale after I've bought them, I cope and try to become reinspired. Reading cookbooks helps set my creative mind back to the ingredients on hand.

Shopping at a supermarket can be even more difficult than at a farmers' market, where you can usually buy as little as you need. There's the matter of bunches. Yes, I can buy a few loose carrots, rather than a bunch, but those loose carrots are often old and starchy. Yes, I can buy a few loose beets, but their leaves are gone and they are tired looking. So I buy a bunch. I know I can't eat a bunch of either vegetable at a sitting. I could take the time to divide the bunch of beets and cook them twice, but that seems like a poor use of my time. Beets take twenty-five to forty-five minutes to cook, depending on their size. Cooked beets hold quite well for many days, which means that they will have to be revisited in a creative way, reheated as a leftover, or thrown out if I've forgotten about them in the back of the fridge.

And what about those appealing little bunches of herbs? How much tarragon can a person eat without getting tired of its licoricey perfume? Will it keep for more than a week, or will I discard half of it and waste sixty cents? It's the idea of waste more than the money. It would be nice to split the herbs with a friend, but no one else may be in the mood for tarragon or dill. Can I dry them? Preserve them in oil? Make a sauce that will keep for a while? I know a window box or small garden patch is a great idea, but not a realistic option for everyone. So does the solo cook have to give up fresh herbs? Either you may

have to learn to live with a little waste, or you will have to become very creative in sauce preparation.

Bunches are just one quandary. What if I am in the mood for roast chicken or meat loaf or, heaven forbid, a rib roast or leg of lamb? Do I have to suppress gratification? Must I ignore my inner cravings and only serve such items when I have company? Should I call around to rustle up a dinner guest to share the meal? Or do I make the chicken or roast anyway and hope I can eat the leftovers and not get sick of them? While not everything can be turned into hash, pasta sauce, risotto, soup, salad, or sandwiches, you'd be surprised at how many variations you can create with leftovers and not feel burdened or bored.

These are some of the culinary decisions a single person must make. While the vast majority of recipes in this book are one-shot meals with no leftovers, there will be a few that address the question of making a whole chicken and using what's left, or planning ahead and cooking two pieces of tuna and using one of them in a pasta or salad within the next few days.

Planning Meals

When you are responsible for cooking for a family, meal planning is important. Others are dependent on you for both sustenance and culinary pleasure. You want to serve balanced meals and offer diverse menus over the course of a week or two. For some, menu planning is an enjoyable creative challenge; for others, it is a difficult or tedious task. Of course, when you cook primarily for yourself, meal planning seems less important. Indeed, some people never do it. They want to feel liberated from such routine or responsibility. They want to be extemporaneous at all costs. Shop, make a meal, eat it, and that's all there is to it. If you are not in the mood to make supper and will settle cheerfully for a bowl of cold cereal, who is to know or care?

Meal planning does not have to be complex, rigid, and routine. It is usually as simple as making a bit more of something so that you have interesting options for a second meal the next night or even a few days later. While this kind of thinking ahead is not required, it can save time and effort. And I find it fun and inspiring to recycle cooked food in a creative fashion.

When I buy a piece of tuna, I often select a slice that is somewhat larger than a single serving so I can have tuna salad or tuna pasta a few nights later. If my week is unpredictable and I don't know if I'll be home in time to use the leftover tuna before it spoils or tastes tired, I'll buy just enough for one meal.

When I cook rice, barley, *farro*, or beans, I sometimes make a double batch so that I have it for another dinner. Having this side dish on hand shortens the cooking time on a night when I need a quick and easy meal. When I am in the mood for meatballs, I generally make enough for two meals, as rolling them can be a pleasurable meditative activity if I have the time, but a nuisance if I am in a hurry. One batch might be eaten with mashed potatoes or polenta. The second time around they could be used in a soup or in a sauce for pasta. And when I make roast chicken just for me, because I am in the mood, I am already anticipating a delicious dinner a night or two down the road.

A NOTE ON PORTION SIZE

The recipes in this book are average-size portions for one. If you are a small eater, some of them may seem large. Many of the recipes represent one-dish meals rather than multiple courses, so I have made them substantial. If you find them too large, cut back or just enjoy the leftovers.

Stocking the Basic Pantry

Setting up a basic pantry is one of the most important tasks of the solo cook. By combining two or three fresh ingredients or leftovers with carefully selected staples that you have on hand, you can have a superb and satisfying supper.

Leftovers: The Basic Reheat and the New Creation

Leftovers fall into two categories. The first is the basic reheat; in other words, you eat it again just as you prepared it the first time. More interesting for the cook is the creative use of leftovers to make a new dish. Fortunately, both kinds of leftovers have a place in your life. If you've made a hearty soup, it is perfectly wonderful reheated, maybe even better. No need to change it. Good is good, even the second time around. (With the advent of the microwave oven, reheating leftovers is a snap.) For a little variety, you can change the side dishes. If you served the stew the first time with rice, try pasta, kasha, *farro*, or potatoes when you reheat it. And on those nights when you are too tired to think about cooking and leftovers are all you can manage, you'll really appreciate your foresight for having made enough for a second helping.

At culinary schools, a big fuss is made over an exercise called "the market basket." The teachers bring identical baskets of ingredients to different chefs and then see what diverse menus and dishes they concoct. And then, because it is a school exercise, they evaluate the results. The solo cook-diner plays this game quite often, and not just with a market basket of fresh ingredients.

That's easy. More often you are working with a combination of a few fresh ingredients, leftovers, and basic pantry staples—a greater challenge! Fortunately, the only person you have to please is yourself. If the dish is a disaster or disappointment, if the flavors are muddled or not what you'd imagined, you can always make an omelet, or sip a glass of wine and eat cheese and bread, have a salad, and relax. If the dish you create is not brilliant, but is still good enough to eat, fine. You've dined economically and well. Sometimes you may invent a dish so good you want to take notes and create it again and again. That is part of the adventure of solo cooking. You're free to make a mistake, a middling meal, or a masterpiece.

Leftovers: Basic Reheats

Soups

change the garnish or add a protein

Stews

serve with rice, mashed potatoes, noodles, or polenta

Cooked vegetables

carrots, beets, green beans, asparagus, and so on

Cooked grains

farro, polenta, rice

Cooked beans and legumes

white beans, black beans, chickpeas, lentils

Leftovers: New Creations

Steak use in steak salad

Farro use as salad, reheat as a *farrotto* (with a vegetable), add to soup

Vegetables such as asparagus, beets, green beans, artichokes, and potatoes use in a composed salad, pasta, risotto, soup, or frittata

Salmon or tuna use in a salad or pasta

Chicken use in a salad, soup, pasta, risotto, or sandwich

Shrimp use in a salad, soup, quesadilla, pasta

Rice or couscous use for salad or add to soup



If you have not had time to market and you're too pooped or cranky to shop, you can create a tasty dinner from goodies you have on the cupboard or refrigerator shelf or in the freezer.

One of the most important culinary lessons I learned while living in Italy was that you should always take the time to find the very best ingredients. Some of my Italian friends would drive a half hour out of their way to get sausage made by a particular butcher in the next town, even though a good sausage was available in their own village. One can economize in many ways, and shop the weekly specials at the market, but for the pantry you will want to splurge and get the finest possible ingredients. They often make all the

difference between a good meal and a wonderful one.

THE CUPBOARD

Oils: A variety of oils for cooking is a must. Buy in small amounts until you know the oils whose flavor you love. Extra-virgin olive oils vary from a peppery Tuscan oil to an almondy Spanish oil to a fruity California oil, and each will give a different flavor profile to a dish. You may want to splurge on walnut or hazelnut oil for salads or on lemon- or orange-infused oil for salads and cooked vegetables or to spoon over grilled fish. Fine oils are expensive, but are typically worth their cost. A neutral-tasting pure olive oil for making mayonnaise or frying and a bland canola or corn oil for deep-frying should round out the selections. If you do any Asian cooking, add a small bottle of sesame oil. Although many bottles are elegant, please do not use them for stove-top display. Keep oils away from heat and light, preferably in a dark, cool cabinet. Also, try to use the oils rather than collect them as if they were wine. They can go rancid after a year or two. Nut oils, once opened, are best stored in the refrigerator as they turn rancid very quickly.

Vinegars: Yes, it's great to have balsamic vinegar on hand. Market shelves are filled with them, real ones and those imposters, regular vinegars flavored with caramel. Shop carefully and accept that you must pay more for a quality product. It is in the selection of good red wine and white wine vinegars that the pickings are slimmer. I love a flavorful, wine-scented red wine vinegar for vinaigrettes. I know that sounds funny, but many red wine vinegars have no fragrance or hint of wine and are incredibly harsh and tannic. You may need to sample a few before you find one you like. Champagne vinegar, maybe an aged sherry vinegar, a rice vinegar, a cider vinegar, and an inexpensive distilled white vinegar will round out your pantry, unless you fall in love with a fruit-based vinegar and have room to store it. Vinegars keep quite well.

Soy Sauce: Soy sauce is no longer an exotic ingredient. Many cooks reach for soy instead of salt. If you love Asian-inspired flavors, soy will be an essential part of your pantry. Light soy is less salty and can be used a bit more liberally than regular soy.

Condiments: Most of us have ketchup as a staple. You'd be surprised what a little spritz can do to round out a sauce. Some cooks prefer the texture and taste of chili sauce and spoon it into a marinade. Others like Asian chile pastes. Sample some and keep one or two on hand. Buy the smallest jars possible. We all have a favorite hot sauce that we add to perk up a dish gone flat or in need of a jolt of heat. Pick one or two you like. And maybe a barbecue sauce, too. Many keep well in a cool cupboard, but to be safe,

especially if you don't use them often, refrigerate them after opening.

I find that an assortment of mustards provides culinary diversity. A strong Dijon mustard, a whole-grain mustard, and a hot-and-sweet mustard (see [page 29](#) to make your own) will add depth of flavor to sauces and vinaigrettes. The market shelves are packed with flavored mustards. Some are good; some sound creative but in fact are dreadful. Taste and be selective. Powdered mustard also adds a bit of subtle heat to a dish, so I keep a can on hand.

While I much prefer to grate fresh horseradish with distilled vinegar and store it in the refrigerator, I do occasionally buy a small jar of prepared horseradish. After opening, store it in the refrigerator. It becomes milder over time.

Canned Foods: In the winter, I rely on canned plum tomatoes, diced tomatoes, tomato purée, and even prepared tomato sauce for sauces and stews. Small cans are available. I keep a tube of tomato paste in the refrigerator for the times when a hint of tomato is needed to brighten a sauce. I stock canned chickpeas and white beans and buy small cans of top-quality canned tuna packed in olive oil. (No water-packed tuna for me. I want flavor.) I keep homemade chicken stock in the freezer, but for emergencies I have low-sodium canned broth on hand: chicken, vegetable, and beef. I also keep soup base on the shelf, such as the porcini broth cubes from Knorr that I bring back from Italy whenever I go.

A small can of coconut milk or cream comes in handy for certain Asian soups and curries. I have a small container of capers packed in salt in the pantry, but if you use brined capers, store them in the refrigerator once they are opened, along with oil-packed anchovies. I used to buy those huge cans of salt-packed anchovies, but they take up more room than I am willing to give them. Now the same company is putting out a delicious oil-cured anchovy, and the jar is small.

It's good to have a few jars of olives on hand, for appetizers and snacks and for cooking. These can be doctored up by warming them with herbs, strips of lemon zest and chiles, in a little extra-virgin olive oil. Sometimes I have a jar of bottled grape leaves, too, in case the urge for dolmas strikes.

Dry Staples and Spices: I always store an assortment of dried legumes in jars, including lentils, split peas, cannellini beans, chickpeas, and black beans. They can be added to soups or salads and help stretch a meal.

I also have grains in small amounts: basmati rice, jasmine rice, arborio rice, wild rice, farro, polenta, barley, and occasionally bulgur, although it can go rancid quickly. I store these in jars as well, as weevils are known to arrive

along with them, and I don't want the pesky bugs taking over my pantry.

An assortment of dried pasta in a variety of shapes is invaluable. Many a night, pasta has been my impromptu dinner, too. Couscous, dried bread crumbs, homemade toasted bread crumbs ([page 82](#)), and matzo meal are kept in airtight containers.

Flour, sugars, baking powders, kosher salt, sea salt, and assorted spices are best stored in a cool, dark cupboard. Spices fade fast, so buy the smallest amounts possible except for those you use all the time, such as peppercorns.

Recipe Suggestions: Using Items in the Pantry

Pasta with pesto and potatoes

Pasta with canned tomatoes, olives, capers, and with or without tuna or anchovies

Pasta with garlic, toasted bread crumbs, lemon zest, and tuna

Spaghetti alla carbonara

Risotto with saffron, almonds, and peas

Curried rice pilaf with nuts and dried fruit

Cheese omelet or soufflé

Potato and onion frittata

Grilled cheese sandwich

Quick potato and onion soup

Lentil or bean soup with pasta or rice

Dolmas

Black bean or red bean chili without meat

Any kind of quiche

Bean salad with canned tuna and garlic-oregano vinaigrette

Honey and Preserves: Keep a few jars of honey-lavender, chestnut, citrus blossom-on hand for sweetening sauces, spreading on biscuits, or spooning alongside selected cheeses. I have assorted marmalades, chutneys, and other preserves, although I must confess that most of mine are homemade, as canning is a hobby and a form of relaxation for me.

Dried Fruits, Chocolate, Extracts, and Specialty Condiments: Dried fruits such as raisins, currants, apricots, and prunes come in handy for braising with meats, for desserts, and for noshing. Chocolate, unsweetened cocoa powder, and vanilla and almond extracts are necessary for desserts. Because of my interest in Middle Eastern foods, I have a jar of tahini, a bottle of pomegranate molasses, and rose and orange-flower waters.

Fresh Vegetables: Onions, garlic, shallots, fresh ginger, and potatoes are stored in a cool, dark place in the cupboard. I buy what I need and try to use them within a week or two.

Spirits: While they are not actually in the pantry, I do keep a bottle of Marsala and one of white vermouth in my liquor cabinet for kitchen use. Brandy, ouzo, dark rum, and a few favorite fruit liqueurs join them for occasional use in the kitchen.

THE FREEZER

Some of my basic pantry resides in the small freezer that tops my refrigerator. There are containers of homemade chicken and fish stock. All walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, and pine nuts are stored in zipped plastic bags, as they can become rancid quickly. To prevent the emergence of weevils, I keep imported porcini and dried ancho and chipotle peppers in the freezer, too.

I have a few carefully wrapped packages of sliced pancetta to enhance pasta sauces and soups or for when the spaghetti alla carbonara craving hits, and maybe a Muscovy duck breast or two. A couple of pounds of unsalted butter are always on hand, and tiny jars of rendered chicken and goose fat are stored in the back of the freezer. I don't use them often, but I know they are there if I need them. A package of frozen peas or corn can come in handy, as can a loaf of bread and a package of English muffins.

THE REFRIGERATOR

I'd be lost without lemons, oranges, and limes, but especially lemons. I use both the zest and the juice in many dishes. They provide the bright flavor accents. As I do a lot of North African cooking, I always have a jar of preserved lemons on hand. Herbs, carrots, and celery are purchased as I need them. I buy the smallest amounts possible.

However, I am not moderate with cheese. It is my weakness. My cheese drawer holds too large an assortment. Most of it is for snacks, desserts, and cooking. I do have a tiny amount of grated pecorino and Parmesan for the occasions when I am in a hurry and don't have time to grate the quantity needed for a dish. But I also have the same cheeses in bulk to grate to order

on a bowl of pasta or soup. Cottage cheese, a small container of sour cream, crème fraîche, mascarpone cheese, and yogurt are in the refrigerator, too. A jar of mayonnaise is on hand, in case I haven't made my own, and a jar of peanut butter for my grandchildren and for making peanut sauce. I always have eggs, butter, and sometimes a small container of half-and-half or light cream, milk, or heavy cream.

Outfitting the Kitchen

Far be it from me to tell you what equipment to buy. I am an equipment addict and have collected too much. My rationalization is that because I am a cooking teacher and I am asked to recommend equipment, I need to try all kinds so that I can evaluate their properties. I do cook for large groups from time to time, for my family and friends often, and for myself the most, so I need a diverse assortment. My best advice is to buy only what you really need. Despite all those tempting low-price offers, I do not recommend buying sets of cooking equipment. There will be some pieces that you will use all the time, and then a few that you rarely, if ever, have the occasion to use.

You should have a small sauté pan for omelets and two larger ones for vegetables, meats, and fish (8 inch, 10 inch, and 12 inch are good), and a pot to boil water for pasta and to make stock (4 to 6 quarts). A heavy Dutch oven for stews and braising will come in handy, as will a few small saucepans for sauces, heating up soups, and so on (1 and 2 quarts, plus a small “butter melter”). Don't forget to get the lids, too. I have a wok for stir-frying and deep-frying, a pan that holds a steamer rack for vegetables, a small roasting pan and rack to hold a duck or chicken, a small loaf pan, and heatproof glass dishes and custard cups for gratins and the like. Acquire a few sharp knives and a sharpening steel, a microplane grater, some stainless-steel mixing bowls in assorted sizes, measuring cups and spoons, a colander, a sieve, a couple of baking sheets, whisks, some spatulas and wooden spoons, and a pair of tongs, and you are ready to cook.

For solo cooks, I would recommend getting the smallest food processor, as the big one is too large for many recipes. A mini-processor can be used to grate small amounts of ginger and mince garlic and chiles quickly and efficiently. A blender, a toaster oven, and a microwave oven to thaw stock or reheat leftovers are useful appliances to live on your countertop. A hand mixer or stand mixer is essential if you like to bake.

Keeping Wine

Wine has always been part of my evening meal. I have a small wine cellar,

and I buy judiciously whenever the opportunity presents itself. I have some inexpensive house whites and reds for everyday drinking and some wonderful bottles that I serve to friends and family for special meals and to me when I want to celebrate. But when you dine alone and drink a glass or two of wine, how do you take care of the rest of the bottle so the wine doesn't fade quickly or even go bad? There are a few solutions to this dilemma.

First, try to find half bottles. They are the solo diner's friend. The next best bet is to buy a can of wine preservative spray that combines nitrogen and argon gas. I use Private Reserve brand, which is sold in wine stores and liquor shops. A few spritzes of this harmless mixture fills the airspace in the bottle. You can then recork the bottle and it will keep for a few days. My son, Evan, a master sommelier, recommended this solution and also gave me some Champagne resealing tops that keep sparkling wine sparkly for a few days in the refrigerator. Doug Fletcher, a wine maker, had another brilliant suggestion to keep wine alive. He gifted me with three small clear glass bottles with screw tops and told me that as soon as I opened a bottle, I should pour the wine into the screw-top bottles and seal them well. The wine will keep for up to two weeks in the fridge.

If I have opened a bottle of Pinot Noir, I try to plan two nights of meals that work with the wine. Same with Sauvignon Blanc or Chianti. The two nights don't have to be consecutive, but the point of drinking wine with food is to have the two elements harmonize so that the meal is more than the sum of its parts.

The Microwave Oven

I am such an old-fashioned cook that for years I resisted buying a microwave oven. I knew that it was not really an "oven" in the classic sense of the word. Everyone I knew used it to reheat coffee, melt chocolate and butter, thaw frozen dinners, and pop popcorn. I know how easy it is to melt butter and chocolate, and I don't eat frozen dinners, so I didn't really need one. At least, I thought I didn't. One evening when I was at my son's house, I noticed that it took him just seconds to reheat leftovers, and they didn't dry out. When I reheated stews, soups, or leftover vegetables, I would place them in the proper pan and heat them on the stove top very, very carefully or in the oven. It took a long time and sometimes the food suffered. I felt that I had injured my own good cooking. Finally, my daughter convinced me to get a microwave oven for leftovers only. It has changed my life.

I can put vegetables, meat, and grain on one plate and reheat the plate! I can

heat pasta or vegetable gratins without drying them beyond palatability. Turkey and stuffing drizzled with gravy are like Thanksgiving at its best. Even rib roast bones remain juicy. I am impressed. I have not yet popped corn or melted butter, but I will confess that I have reheated coffee a few times. Anyway, I am no longer a total culinary snob. Yes, I can cook the long way, the short way, and now I can quickly reheat my good work in the microwave without dirtying all the pots and pans in the house just for one supper.