



*The Pleasures of Cooking for One*

JUDITH JONES

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of Cooking  
for One*

**Judith Jones**



Alfred A. Knopf New York 2009

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Portions of this work originally appeared in *O, The Oprah Magazine*.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jones, Judith, [date]

The pleasures of cooking for one / Judith Jones.—1st ed.

p. cm.

eISBN: 978-0-307-95787-0

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Cookery for one. I. Title.

TX652.J6723 2009 641.5'61—dc22 2009012307

**Illustrations credits** All photographs by Christopher Hirsheimer, with the exception of the following pages: Chris Vandercook: [1.10](#), [4.1](#), [5.4](#), and [6.1](#); Ken Schneider: [3.2](#); Bronwyn Dunne: [4.2](#).

Jacket photograph by Christopher Hirsheimer

Jacket design by Carol Devine Carson

v3.1

**To my great grandchildren,  
Jonah and Odessa and Cooper and Shepard.  
May they be blessed with the Muse and enjoy the pleasures  
of cooking.**

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**Also by Judith Jones**

The Tenth Muse: My Life in Food

**WITH EVAN JONES**

The Book of *New New* England Cookery

The Book of Bread

Knead It, Punch It, Bake It!

**WITH ANGUS CAMERON**

The L. L. Bean Game and Fish Cookbook

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**One Cooking Through the Week**

Poultry, meat, and fish dishes with second and third rounds and variations

**Two Soups for All Seasons**

Making seasonal soups out of what's at hand

**Three The Magic of Eggs—and the Seduction of Cheese**

Using eggs to make a meal and cheese to enhance it

**Four Improvising with Vegetable, Salads, and Sauces**

Vegetables stuffed, baked, and roasted; salads with substance; and sauces to enliven

**Five Rice, Pasta, Grains, and Legumes**

As accompaniments and carriers for leftovers

**Six Treats, Sweets, and Special Indulgences**

Breads, cookies, comforting desserts, and preserves to make on a lazy Sunday, plus a few lovely treats to enjoy alone

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## Introduction



After my husband, Evan, died in 1996, I was not sure that I would ever enjoy preparing a meal for myself and eating it alone. But as I described in *The Tenth Muse: My Life in Food*, I was wrong, and I soon realized that the pleasure that we shared together was something to honor. I found myself at the end of the day looking forward to cooking, making recipes that work for one, and then sitting down and savoring a good meal.

A number of readers responded to the section in my book on cooking alone, with its sample recipes. One woman told me that she hadn't cooked in several years, since her husband died, but that my experience encouraged her to get going again, and she wanted more ideas. I was particularly pleased that young people on their own for the first time would approach me asking how to get started, what basics and what equipment they needed. They wanted to make for themselves relatively inexpensive, healthy, and, of course, delicious meals, but most cookbooks were too daunting and did not address the single fledgling cook on a tight food budget. I've also talked to so many live-alones who have been too busy with their careers, but who like good food and have gradually come to feel that they've been missing something.

Fifty-one percent of the population in the New York metropolitan area lives alone. Yet no one seems to cater to their needs. Supermarkets do everything they can to make us buy more than we need, and the food industry has for more than a century been selling the idea that it is demeaning for women to cook and a waste of time when they can buy ready-made products instead. So I felt compelled to write this book to share with you the strategies I have devised for beating the system. It isn't a cookbook for what Julia Child used to call "the flimsies"—that is, people who aren't genuinely interested in cooking and want fast and easy recipes and shortcuts at the expense of taste. This book is for those of you who want to roll up your sleeves and enjoy, from day to day, one of the great satisfactions of life.



I do, however, hear the naysayers protesting. Yes, I like to cook, they say, but I like to cook for *others*, to give my friends pleasure. Why would I want to go to all that trouble just for me? My answer is: If you like good food, why not honor yourself enough to make a pleasing meal and relish every mouthful? Of course, we want to share with others, too, but we don't always have family and friends around. And I can't see taking in my neighbors every night.

Others object to the expense involved, and the waste. You have to go out shopping, they complain, and buy all those pricey ingredients that chefs call for, and you can't use them up before they turn rotten. Leftovers are boring; who wants to eat cold lamb all week? Actually, it's all a matter of strategy. Moreover, you are in charge of what you're cooking, picking your own ingredients, deciding how much fat or salt or sugar you want to consume and whether you want to spend extra to have grass-fed, local beef or an organic

farmyard chicken.

Cooking for yourself is particularly creative because you are inspired by what's in your fridge or freezer or garden or nearby market. You don't have to follow a recipe slavishly; you can substitute as you like—planning how to make three quite different dishes from, say, a tenderloin of pork—putting leftovers to good use, taking advantage of leftovers, having in the freezer certain basic items, and so on. If you follow the tactics I recommend, what you save on food costs will astonish you.

Another advantage to cooking for yourself is that you have only yourself to please. So you can indulge in a sudden whim. You can choose to make just what *you* feel like—perhaps only a light, simple supper dish or a salad if you've consumed a rich meal at lunch that day. There's no need to be a perfectionist, trying to win applause from your guests. If a sauce curdles, you'll eat it anyway. And you'll learn from your mistakes.

I suspect that a lot of Americans eat too much just because it's there on the plate. They've got to clean it up. But if you deliberately set aside several chunks of meat from the stew you've made to use in a bean dish for a second round, you feel good about not gobbling it all up, already anticipating its reincarnation.

Then there are what I call "cook's treats." For instance, that package of giblets that comes with a whole roasting chicken: the liver can be used to make yourself a delicious shirred egg for breakfast or lunch; the giblets and neck will go into a soup pot. There's often the bonus of that little bit of glaze left in the meat skillet, just enough to moisten and deepen the flavor of the hash you plan to make later in the week. To say nothing of the fact that you can afford to lavish on yourself the occasional rather expensive lobster, or soft-shell crabs, or a rich piece of goose or duck confit (the scraps of which can go into a mini-cassoulet).

Finally, there is something about going home at the end of the day or giving over a quiet Sunday afternoon to cooking—smashing the garlic, chopping an onion, getting all those good cooking smells going, stirring, and tasting mindfully, and then adjusting the seasonings—that makes us feel creative. It is a comforting form of relaxation—something that is needed in our busy lives. I always love the moment of drama, too, when everything comes together and I quickly dish up my handiwork, arranging it pleasingly on a warm plate, and then take it to the table, where I've set a place for one with a cloth napkin in a family napkin ring. I open up the wine and light the candles, turn on some music, and give thanks.

I wouldn't miss this pleasure for anything. And I hope that the strategies and the flexible recipes I offer here will encourage you to join in the fun.

# One

## Cooking Through the Week

ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT WHEN COOKING FOR ONE

CONVENIENT EXTRAS

INDISPENSABLE UTENSILS

GOOD TO HAVE IN THE CUPBOARD

WHAT TO HAVE IN THE FREEZER

WHAT TO HAVE IN THE REFRIGERATOR

ESSENTIALS FOR THE VEGETABLE AND FRUIT BINS

A WORD ABOUT PORTION SIZE

THE LANGUAGE OF COOKING

Broiled Chicken

*Variation:* Roast Rock Cornish Hen

*Variation:* Whole Roast Chicken

Chicken Divan

*Second round:* Minced Chicken on Toast

Chicken Breast (or Leg-Thigh Pieces) Sautéed

THE NINE LIVES OF A TURKEY

Skirt Steak

*Second round:* Beef with Sauce Gribiche

HERBS AND SPICES

*Third round:* Gratin of Beef, Mushrooms, and Breadcrumbs

GOOD BEEF RAISED CLOSE TO HOME

Boeuf Bourguignon

Veal Kidneys in Mustard Sauce

*Second round:* Beef and Kidney Pie

Beef Shank and Oxtail Ragù

*Second round:* Oxtails with Grits or Polenta

*Third round:* Penne with a Meaty Sauce

Calf's Liver with Shallot and Wine Pan Sauce

Lemony Scaloppine of Pork

Gratinate of Pork Scaloppine with Eggplant or Zucchini Slices

A Small Roast Pork Tenderloin

*Second round:* Red Flannel Pork Hash

Pork Stir-Fry with Vegetables

Broiled Lamb Chop with Broiled New Potatoes

*Second round:* Lamb and Lentils

### ABOUT GARLIC

Braised Shoulder Lamb Chops

Moroccan-Style Lamb Shanks with Potatoes and Peas

*Second round:* Couscous with Lamb, Onions, and Raisins

A Simplified Lamb Curry

Blanquette de Veau with Leeks

Fresh Veal Tongue

A Small Meatloaf with a French Accent

A Slice of Baked Ham

Farm-Raised Snapper with Fennel, Scallions, and Red Pepper

Baked Bass with Fingerlings and Zucchini

Fillet of Fish in Parchment

Fish Cakes

Sautéed Shrimp

Pan-Seared Salmon

Broiled Bluefish or Mackerel over a Bed of Artichoke Hearts and Potatoes

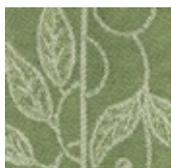
Roasted Branzino (Loup de Mer)

Steamed Mussels

*Second round:* Chinese Style

*Third rounds:* On the Half Shell with Dressing

*À l'Escargot*



The secret of making cooking for one fun and creative is not to think of a meal as self-contained but to understand that home cooking is an ongoing process, one dish leading to another. When I'm doing my major food shopping on the weekend, as most working people do, I visualize the week ahead. What do I have a yen for? How many meals am I going to be eating at home? If I buy this tempting whole tenderloin of pork, I can see using it in at least three different ways: one night, a few slices sautéed in a lemony pan sauce; another, a simple quick roast macerated first in garlic and ginger (any leftovers from that might go into a hash or a rice dish); finally, the thinner end piece cut up for an Asian-type stir-fry with lots of vegetables.

And what about fish? Most cooks feel that it doesn't keep well and has lost its bloom if you try to reincarnate it. But I've found that if I have bought a whole fish or a fillet that's too large for just me, when I use up the leftovers the next day or so in a crispy fish cake, or a fish salad, or combined with other seafood to make a fish soup, a pasta, or a risotto, it comes to life again.

No two of these dishes taste the same, so I never get bored with my leftovers. To me they are like treasures in the fridge that inspire me to do something imaginative as I play with accents from different cuisines. I try, too, to think of a meal in which the vegetables and sometimes the starch are incorporated into the main event. That way it becomes a satisfying meal-in-one-dish to sit down to.

So in this chapter, which I consider the heart of the book, are my main dishes featuring poultry, meats, and fish that have several lives. Nothing is written in stone, however. If you don't happen to have an ingredient that I suggest, try a likely substitute—a shallot for a small onion, some fennel instead of celery, a different root vegetable to replace the ubiquitous carrot, dried mushrooms for fresh. Above all, don't throw away those few tablespoons of cooked spinach, or the three or four extra spears of asparagus you couldn't quite finish, and particularly the little bit of precious juice left in the pan—all these can be used in myriad ways and offer the single home cook some creative challenges.



## Essential Equipment When Cooking for One

*In making dishes for one, it is crucial to have the right size pans. You can't just reduce a recipe without reducing the dimensions of the utensil in which it is to be cooked. So here are the pans that I call for frequently and which you should have at hand.*

A small, heavy pot with cover, 4-cup capacity (I favor Le Creuset), for browning and then braising. This is the pot I use the most.

A large all-purpose 4-quart pan for pasta, stocks, and blanching vegetables

A cast-iron skillet with a bottom diameter of 6 inches, useful for high-heat searing

A larger, nonstick skillet with a bottom diameter of about 8 inches, for larger amounts and stir-fries

A nonstick omelet pan with a bottom diameter of 5½–6½ inches

A small cocotte or other flameproof casserole with lid, 1–1½-cup capacity, that can go on top of the stove and into the oven

A single-portion shallow gratin dish 5 inches in diameter and 1¼ inches deep

A collapsible steamer

A medium-sized strainer

## Convenient Extras

A food processor

An immersion blender

A couple of Silpat mats

A small wok with cover

A single-portion tart ring with removable bottom

A single-portion soufflé dish

Poultry shears

A large Chinese mesh spoon, called a “spider,” for scooping up pasta or vegetables

A small nutmeg grater

An inexpensive mandoline

A spice grinder

A standing mixer

A small ice cream maker



*Some of the cooking pots and pans I use most often, clockwise, starting from above right: a 4-cup Le Creuset pot; a 6-inch cast-iron skillet; inside it, a small ovenproof casserole with lid; a shallow gratin dish; an omelet pan*



*My favorite knives and a sharpening stone*

## Indispensable Utensils

A small whisk

A spatula

A pair of tongs

A sturdy wooden spoon or two

A good pepper mill

A box grater

A cheese grater (I much prefer a microplane or a carpenter's rasp)

Excellent knives: minimum of 1 paring knife, 1 chef's knife, and a bread knife

A sharpening stone

## Good to Have in the Cupboard

Flours: all-purpose white, whole-wheat, and instant-blending

Baking powder

Baking soda

Cornstarch

Panko (Japanese breadcrumbs)

Sugars: granulated, confectioners', and brown

Salts: table and kosher

Rice: long-grain, short-grain, and wild

Peppercorns

Dried (and canned) beans (see [Legumes](#) for suggestions)

Polenta

Pastas of various shapes

Oils: extra-virgin olive oil and light olive or other vegetable oil

Toasted sesame oil

Canned chicken broth

Canned beef broth

Vinegars: red- and white-wine, aged balsamic, and rice

Canned San Marzano tomatoes

Tomato paste (refrigerate after opening)

An assortment of dried herbs and spices (the ones I use most are: bay leaves, curry, *herbes de Provence*, peppercorns, chili pepper flakes, paprika, rosemary, thyme, cinnamon, coriander, cumin, and nutmeg)

Canned tuna fish in olive oil

Canned salmon

Soy sauce

## What to Have in the Freezer

Chicken broth or stock

Beef broth or stock

*Glace de viande* (optional; see [box](#))

Breadcrumbs

Veal, lamb, and duck broth,  
if available

Tomato sauce

Cream sauce

Pesto

Nuts

Sausages

Leftover meat and poultry, raw and cooked

Bacon

Surplus fresh vegetables, fruits,  
and berries

Ice cream

Bread dough

Pastry dough

Cookie dough

## What to Have in the Refrigerator

Eggs

Butter, preferably unsalted

Heavy cream

Milk

Whole-milk yogurt

Cheese

Dijon mustard

Mayonnaise (Hellmann's Real or your own [homemade](#))

Yeast

In the fruit drawer:

Oranges, lemons, apples, and other seasonal fruits

In the vegetable drawer:

Scallions, ginger, parsley, salad greens (see [box](#))

Carrots  
Red bell pepper  
Celery  
Mushrooms (best to pack them loosely in a large glass jar so they can breathe)  
Ham and/or prosciutto  
Smoked fish  
Sausage, dried and fresh  
Small jars of your own:  
[Pesto](#) or [green sauce](#)  
Salad dressing ([vinaigrette](#))  
Meat juice and drippings  
Maple syrup, if opened  
Jams and/or jellies, if opened  
[Preserved lemons](#)  
Olives  
Pickles