

WHEN MART OR EMERIL COOK YOU KNOW PORK FAT RULES 03/06/01

When I find myself at home for an extended period, my thoughts often begin to focus on food. I find this occurring more often the older I get and the more excuses I can find to stay in out of the cold.

My latest musings found me delving the recesses of my mind to retrieve the details of my first culinary attempts. I recalled they, like most of my early attempts at life's first ventures, were launched by my mom.

She initiated it one morning after my complaint about how my eggs were cooked. I was assured it would not be a future problem for her, but a personal one for me because henceforth, I would be cooking my own. A devotee of the John Wayne School of Child Psychology, she was true to her word, never relented and I was left to my own devices.

The twig did not fall far from the tree and I persevered to prove to her that it is possible to cook, what to my mind are, perfect eggs every time.

What is the perfect egg, you ask? To start with they have to be fresh and jumbo to suit me. I like them straight up, the whites well done with crispy edges, the yolks uncooked and fried in butter. You're in the equivalent of hog heaven with them served over buttered toast or with a heap of crispy hash brown potatoes.

I have never looked back after learning to cook my own eggs and went from there on to bacon, sausage, pancakes and the usual breakfast fare.

A particular pleasure of my young life was a breakfast of butter-fried pasture mushrooms with toast made with homemade bread. I would get up early and head with market basket in hand, for one of the many cow or sheep pastures skirting our small village to gather the wild field mushrooms that sprang up magically in the overnight coolness. They had to be gathered early to insure freshness which evaporated quickly in the heat of a summers day.

Similar in appearance to the domestic cultivated mushrooms we commonly buy in supermarkets, the field mushrooms' resemblance ended there. They are a different species (*Agaricus campestris*) with a stronger, better flavor than their cultivated cousin.

My cooking horizons expanded along with my camping and outdoor activities in my early teens. It necessitated learning how to prepare a greater variety of food on

campfires or portable camp-stoves in a time when today's dehydrated and prepared foods were nonexistent.

I stumbled upon what soon became a staple and trademark entree in my repertoire of gastronomical delights that are still expounded upon some 50+ years later. It is Campbell's canned pork and beans heated and enhanced with generous chunks of fried slab bacon. Occasionally, a dab of prepared mustard was added for a further touch of ambiance to a welcome repast after hard day afield or on the water.

The entree usually added a certain air to the after dinner conversation and pillow talk as we faded off to dreamland in the confines of our tent and sleeping bags, as well.

Bacon has long been a principal ingredient in many of the basic dishes I rely on both in camp and at home. I prefer the old-style slab thick sliced to the more modern version of wafer-thin sliced bacon popular with the general public today.

Bacon can be used to enhance several things like tomato sauces, bean dishes, greens and soups. It's the perfect accompaniment to eggs, pancakes, waffles and French toast. The same can be said for liver and onions and my all-time favorite, the BLT.

Bacon keeps well with minimal refrigeration, is simple and quick to prepare and tastes great. The drippings are a bonus for frying fish, eggs or potatoes in or for starting the fire.

If you're nervous about its effects on your circulatory system, it's a good incentive to move off your butt to burn it up. To make a long story short, heed the advice and counsel of the most famous chef of all, Emeril – "Pork Fat Rules!"