

Economic ground beef is versatile, goes ethnic

Fast, economical, easy-to-prepare and convenient meals. That's what today's busy cooks are demanding. And that's what they can expect when they use one of the most versatile and least expensive beef cuts in the meat case — ground beef.

Ground beef's versatility is primarily due to the way it is made. It's mechanically ground lean beef from the round, chuck, flank, neck or shank and lean meat trimmings cut from the rib and loin.

The price usually varies, depending on the ratio of lean meat to fat. These variations range from 70 percent lean to 90 percent lean, but are never less than 70 percent lean.

Versatility also is evident in the many ways ground beef can be prepared. It can be broiled, panbroiled, panfried, roasted or cooked in the microwave oven. And with the addition of various seasonings, it can take on different flavors from around the world.

For example, classic ground beef stuffed peppers can take on an altogether different flavor by adding an Italian parsley pesto and rice-shaped orzo pasta to the stuffing mixture. Besides being featured in this recipe for Beef 'n Orzo Stuffed Peppers can be prepared and cooked in just 45 minutes in the oven and less in the microwave oven.

Many upscale restaurants are serving this crust pizzas with new and unusual ingredients. Ground beef can really go gourmet when it's used as a topping for a version of this "light" pizza, Easy Beef Tortilla Pizzas.

Flour tortillas serve as the crust for these individual pizzas. Because of ground beef's versatility, a slight variation in seasoning and cheeses can change the pizzas from Greek to Mexican.

The final test of ground beef's versatility is to turn the ever-popular hamburger into a regional specialty, Cajun Beef Burgers. Distinctive Cajun cooking comes from Louisiana and has been influenced by the French, Spanish, Blacks and Indians. Another word to describe Cajun is "hot."

To make Cajun Beef Burgers, ground beef patties are seasoned liberally, topped with a combination of garlic salt, paprika, basil, mustard, thyme, red pepper and black pepper. A contrasting coolness is provided by topping the finished burgers with tender-crisp cooked onion rings, tomato slices and a dollop of sour cream.

The possibilities of ground beef recipes are unlimited. Right now the price of ground beef is at its lowest in six years. So stock up, and see how many new ground beef recipes you can discover.

minutes. Sprinkle with remaining Parmesan cheese.

EASY BEEF TORTILLA PIZZAS

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 20 minutes

1 lb. ground beef

1 medium onion, chopped

1 tsp. each dried oregano leaves and salt

4 large (10-inch) flour tortillas

1 cup olive oil

1 medium tomato, seeded and chopped

Greek topping* or Mexican topping*

Cook ground beef and onion in large frying pan until beef loses pink color. Pour off drippings. Sprinkle oregano and salt over beef, stirring to combine. Place tortillas on 2 large baking sheets. Lightly brush surface of each tortilla with oil. Bake tortillas in preheated hot oven, 400°F for 3 minutes. Spoon an equal portion of beef mixture evenly over top of each tortilla; top with an equal amount of tomato and desired topping. Bake in hot oven, 400°F for 12-14 minutes, rearranging baking sheets halfway through cooking time. Makes 4 servings.

GREEK TOPPING

1 tsp. dried basil leaves

1/2 tsp. lemon pepper

4 ozs. Feta cheese, crumbled

1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Sprinkle basil, lemon pepper, Feta, cheese and Parmesan cheese over ground beef.

MEXICAN TOPPING

1 tsp. dried cilantro (coriander) leaves

1/2 cup crushed red pepper pods

1 cup shredded Monterey Jack or Cheddar cheese

1/2 cup sliced ripe olives

Sprinkle cilantro, red pepper pods, cheese and olives over ground beef.

CAJUN BEEF BURGERS

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 10 minutes

1 lb. ground beef

1 tsp. each garlic salt and paprika

1/2 tsp. each dried basil leaves, dry mustard and dried thyme leaves

1/2 cup each ground red pepper and fresh ground black pepper

1 medium onion, sliced and separated into rings

2 hamburger buns, split and toasted

4 large tomato slices, 1/4 inch thick

Dairy sour cream

Divide ground beef into 4 equal portions and form into patties 4 inches in diameter. Combine garlic salt, paprika, basil, mustard, thyme, ground red pepper and pepper in a small bowl. Press seasoning mixture evenly into both sides of patties. Meanwhile heat a heavy large non-stick frying pan over medium-high heat for 5 minutes. Cook patties 6 minutes, turning once. Remove patties from pan; keep warm. Quickly cook and stir onion rings at high heat until tender-crisp. Place a tomato slice on each bun half; top with a patty and an equal portion of onion. Garnish with sour cream. Makes 4 servings.

Turn economical ground beef into three uniquely different entrees — Beef 'n Orzo Stuffed Peppers, Easy Beef Tortilla Pizzas with Greek or Mexican Topping and Cajun Beef Burgers.

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