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One of Hamilton's secrets is a pantry stocked with "convenient" basic ingredients. (See story inside).

The right equipment is important too. Sharpen your knives — a dull one will slow you down — and use the right one for the job. As an example, Hamilton says it's much faster to chop or slice an onion with a large, sharp chef's knife than with a tiny paring knife.

She uses her microwave as a tool — to heat vegetables, melt butter and chocolate — and finishes the job with other appliances. "I like the smell of cooking. It's very nurturing for the family," she said.

Putting her kids to work also saves time. "I was shocked to learn that many kids aren't allowed in the kitchen," she said.

"If you don't let them help they will want your attention. Kids are interested in food. They can mix salad dressings. My son, Jeff, who is 9, peels and devils shrimp."

What good is your food processor if it's hidden away in a kitchen cupboard or the basement? Put it where you can use it, recommends Gassenheimer, author of "Dinner in Minutes" (Chapters Publishing, \$29.95 hardcover, \$19.95 paperback).

"Clear the kitchen so you can kind of hit it running when you come home from work," she said during a telephone interview. "Starting with a clean sink can save as much as 10 to 15 minutes from preparations."

Gassenheimer is executive director of Gardner's Markets, a chain of supermarkets in Miami.

"Dinner in Minutes" recipes originated in Gassenheimer's nationally syndicated Miami Herald column; also called "Dinner in Minutes."

She's also the mother of three grown boys, who developed her style of cooking after 25 years of juggling work and family schedules.

Leave it to Betty Crocker to write a can't fail guide to "Quick Dinners," (Prentice Hall, \$8). The book is one of a series of new cookbooks. The other titles are "Betty Crocker's Low-Calorie Cooking," "Betty Crocker's Make-A-Minute Easy," and "Betty Crocker's Great Chicken Recipes."

At \$8 each, they're bargained, and available at book stores, supermarkets and department stores. Each book contains more than 100 recipes.

Bartz, who manages the Betty Crocker Kitchens at General Mills, Inc. in Minneapolis, Minn., stopped by the Observer's Eccentric Livonia office during a media tour to promote the cookbooks. Prepared by a team of home economists in the Betty Crocker Kitchens, the books contain some previously published recipes updated for today's lifestyle. Two more cookbooks are in the works.

"The recipes are easy. They use ingredients you have on hand, or that are easy to buy, with equipment you have on hand," said Bartz. "These are practical, service-oriented recipes. They're affordable, fresh, fast, flavorful and nutritious."

See more tips and recipes inside.

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See more tips and recipes inside.

Take a crack at recycling eggs

See Larry's column Taste Buds on Taste front.

HOMEMADE EGGY THOUSAND ISLAND SALAD DRESSING

- 1 cup mayonaisse or salad dressing
 - 1 tablespoon sweet pickled relish
 - 2 tablespoons chili sauce or catsup
 - 1 teaspoon finely chopped onion
 - dash paprika
 - 2 hard-cooked eggs, chopped fine
- Combine all ingredients and mix well. Cover and refrigerate. Makes almost 1 1/2 cups.

EXACTLY SEAFOOD STROGANOFF

- 3 tablespoons margarine or butter
 - 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
 - 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
 - dash salt and pepper
 - 2 1/2 cups milk
 - 1 cup flaked crabmeat, shrimp or lobster
 - 4 hard-cooked eggs, cut into fourths
- Heat margarine or butter in a 2-quart saucepan over low heat until melted. Stir in flour, mustard, salt

and pepper. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly until smooth and bubbly. (Congratulations, you just made a "roux.") Slowly stir in milk, whisking constantly to avoid lumps. Heat to almost a boil and cook for 1 minute.

Gently stir in seafood and eggs. Can be spooned over English muffins for a great "brunchable" or dinner!

BAKEY-EGGY

- 1/2 cup seasoned bread crumbs
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine, melted
- 2 hard-cooked eggs, sliced
- 4 slices bacon, chopped
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1/2 small onion, chopped fine
- 1 tablespoon milk
- dash salt and pepper
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese

Toas breadcrumbs with margarine; sprinkle onto the bottom of an 8 by 8 or similar square or round baking dish. Layer egg slices over bread crumb mixture. Cook bacon until crispy drain. Mix bacon with sour cream, onion, milk, salt and pepper. Pour over hard-cooked eggs, top with shredded cheese. Bake at 350 degrees F., uncovered for 15 minutes. Great with biscuits!

Make delicious meals after work fast

See related story on Taste front.

PORK TENDERLOINS WITH APRICOT GLAZE

- 1 1/2 pork tenderloins (about 1 pound)
 - Salt and freshly ground pepper
 - 1 small garlic clove
 - 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
 - 1/4 cup port
 - 2 tablespoons apricot jam
- Cut the pork tenderloins into 8 medallions about 3/4-inch thick. Season with salt and pepper. Mince the garlic. Heat the oil in a large frying pan over high heat. When the oil is hot, add the pork medallions and cook, turning once, until the pork is nicely browned outside with no trace of pink in the center, about 6 minutes total cooking time. Remove the pork to a platter.
- Add the garlic to the pan and cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Whisk in the port and apricot jam and boil over high heat, stirring, another minute or so. Return the pork and

any accumulated juices to the pan and heat through. Serve immediately. Serves 3 to 4.

Recipe from "The 5 in 10 Cookbook" by Paula Gassenheimer, (Hearst Books, \$15)

BALSAMIC STEAK

- 1 1/4 pounds skirt, flank or lean sirloin steak
 - 1 cup balsamic vinegar
 - 2 tablespoons chopped onion
 - Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- Remove fat from meat. Place in a bowl or plastic bag with vinegar and onion. Let marinate 20 minutes. Drain and place on a hot grill or under a preheated broiler. For rare, cook 5 minutes if steak is thin or 8 minutes if thicker. Cook longer if you like it medium or well done.
- Remove to cutting board, cover with foil and let rest 5 minutes. Slice on a diagonal against the grain. Serves 4.

ROSEMARY ROASTED POTATOES

- 4 russet or Idaho potatoes (about 2 pounds)
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 6 shallots, chopped or 1/2 small onion, chopped
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary or 1 teaspoon dried

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Wash potatoes and cut into strips about 1/2 inch thick and 2 inches long. Heat butter in nonstick even-proof skillet large enough to hold potatoes in one layer. Add potatoes and shallots and saute over medium heat for 15 minutes, shaking the pan or tossing potatoes every few minutes. Add rosemary and toss with potatoes. Bake in oven 10 minutes longer. Serves 4.

Recipe from "Dinner in Minutes," Linda Gassenheimer, (Chapters Publishing \$19.95)

HAM AND ZUCCHINI WITH POPPY SEEDS

- 1 medium onion, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons margarine or butter
- 3 cups cut-up fully cooked smoked ham
- 4 small zucchini (about 1 1/2 pound), cut into 1/4-inch strips
- 1 green bell pepper, cut into 1/4-inch slices
- 1/2 teaspoon poppy seeds
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1 teaspoon poppy seeds

Cook and stir onion in margarine in 10-inch skillet until tender. Stir in ham, zucchini, bell pepper and pepper. Cover and cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are crisp-tender, about 8 minutes.

Stir in sour cream and poppy seeds; heat just until hot. Serve with hot cooked rice or noodles if desired. Serves 6.

Recipe from "Betty Crocker's Quick Dinners," (Prentice Hall, \$8)

'Beat the dinner bell' game

Linda Hamilton offers these tips to "beat the dinner bell" game in "The 5 in 10 Cookbook: 5 Ingredients in 10 Minutes or Less," (Hearst Books, \$15).

- Read the recipe completely before you start.
- Get out all of the ingredients and equipment before you begin cooking. The professionals call it preparing the mise en place, or getting everything together.

- Don't set the 10-minute timer before you know exactly what you are doing.
- Be single-minded and keep a watchful eye on what you're cooking.
- Put a pot of water on the stove to cook pasta in as soon as you come in the door, before you take off your coat. Before you drain the water from the pasta, toss in some vegetables to cook too.

Plan meals, shopping to save time

Here are some tips for planning meals, shopping and dinner preparation from Linda Gassenheimer, author of "Dinner in Minutes: Memorable Meals for Busy Cooks," (Chapters Publishing).

- Make a list of about four meals in advance. Buy fresh ingredients that will keep at least four days in the refrigerator to go along with the staples you already have on hand.
- Shopping at the end of the day when stores are crowded is tiring, especially if you have to go home and cook late. Keep a cooler in the trunk of your car so that you can shop before work or at lunch.
- Let your supermarket help you.

Supermarket services available can include pre-cut vegetables, and fruit, prewashed salads and meats and poultry cut for stir-frying. Some markets will shell shrimp for you.

- Keep pasta, pizza shells and bottled or frozen sauces on hand for emergency dinners.
- Freeze good-quality, freshly grated Parmesan cheese. It can be measured without defrosting and will quickly reach room temperature.
- The quickest way to cook rice is especially if you have to go home and cook late. It turns out perfect and fluffy and takes only 10 minutes, or half the normal time.
- Replace vegetable peelers often.

Like knives, they need to be sharp to work efficiently. If you still have one from five years ago, invest in a new one.

- If you keep two or three chopping boards available, you won't have to stop and wash a board while cooking. I prefer those that are dish-water safe. I also like a medium-size one that can easily be moved around so I can chop all my vegetables on it and carry it to the stove.
- You really only need three sharp knives on hand. For most cutting tasks, a 13-inch and an 8-inch are sufficient. Additionally, a stainless-steel serrated knife is perfect for cutting fruit or tomatoes.

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