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www.food

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What did we ever do before the Web? That's a question we frequently ask each other at the Pioneer Press food section. Thanks to the ability to bookmark, we've got a bevy of useful Web sites to turn to when we need help converting cooking measurements, finding a correct spelling for some esoteric ingredient or simply craving a little restaurant gossip. Below are our favorites. Check them out. And if you like them as much as we do, add them to your list. Around here, we believe you can never have enough food.

Food & Cooking

Aaa-recipes.com: What makes this site appealing is the recipes are listed by ingredient, so if it's asparagus time, with one click, you will have more than 40 recipes that use asparagus along with nutritional information. There's also a culinary dictionary, crockpot conversion chart, roasting timetable, wine pronunciation guide and list of heirloom measurements so, when you want to bake Grandma's spice cake, you'll know a wineglass of buttermilk equals $\frac{1}{4}$ cup and a teacup of brown sugar is a scant $\frac{3}{4}$ cup.

Baking911.com: Besides recipes, this site has good technique and how-to instructions, ingredient information, free advice from experts and lots of tips. If you look up something like walnuts, the site explains how to blanch, how to toast, what to substitute. There's also a members' photo gallery, so you can post your baking creations.

Bbc.co.uk/food: Remember when British food was a joke? How times have changed across the pond. From the behemoth broadcasting company, this site is easy to navigate and offers an eclectic mix. Highlights include interactive videos, a weights and measures converter, message board, glossary, online newsletter, master classes by Madhur Jaffrey and other top BBC chefs. Of course, there are tons of recipes, including an in-season section broken down by month. (March in England means rhubarb, radishes and sorrel.) Another attraction: You can listen to BBC radio while you're whipping up a pot of curried lentil and lime soup.

Bettycrocker.com: If you prefer to stick to the classics, this is the Web site for you. Everything has been tested again and again in the company's kitchen, so you never have to worry about a recipe not working. There's also a section on meal planning as well as nutrition info and conversion charts (1 cup of dried apricots is about 5 ounces) and emergency substitutions (if you run out of cake flour, use 2 tablespoons less of all-purpose for every cup).

Cookinglight.com: Light cooking may be the theme here, but butter, cream and cheese are not dirty words — the recipes just use less of them. Here it's all moderation — eating healthier rather than being diet-focused. Highlights include recipes ranging from classic to ethnic, cooking techniques and menu planning.

Nice photos, too. If you're thinking of starting your own cooking club, there's a regional bulletin board where you can hook up with people in your area with the same eating sensibilities.

Cooksillustrated.com: This is one you have to pay for (\$25 a year), but it's worth it if you cook a lot, love to experiment and are up on the latest kitchen products and gadgets. Basically, cooksillustrated.com is the Consumer Reports of cooking — and it's all provided without any advertising.

Epicurious.com: Recipes from Gourmet and Bon Appetit magazines plus food and wine dictionaries, a metric conversion chart and video how-tos on things like stirring a risotto, making a pie and poaching eggs. There's also a message board, so you can swap tales with other foodies, and an auction link where you can bid on a vacation package to some exotic getaway.

Exploratorium.edu/cooking: This is a food-science site, so if you want to know how meat gets its flavor or how to stop crystals from forming when you make candy, this is the place to go. There are also discussion boards, live Web casts and recipes.

Foodandwine.com: A terrific compilation of recipes, taste tests, news and notes on food, wine, travel and cooking from the magazine by the same name. There's advice on kitchen design, a restaurant guide and regular video podcasts, too — like the recent one of superchef Mario Batali cooking from the Annual Food & Wine Classic in Aspen, Colo.

Foodnetwork.com: Cooking, party ideas, videos and lots more from the 24/7 cable food channel. Highlights include cleaning tips (get rid of stains on stainless-steel sinks by mixing cream of tartar with hydrogen peroxide and rubbing well) and a nifty herb and spice guide with photos, tasting notes and recipes.

Leitesculinaria.com: Feast on David Leite's online magazine, which is as much about "eating a good meal as it is reading about one." It's beautifully designed and frequently updated with new recipes, contests, book reviews and food history, like the origins of the Red Velvet Cake.

Marthastewart.com: Cooking, baking, message boards, recipes, tips and how-tos. If you want to make something wonderful for dinner or are throwing a party, nobody has better ideas than Martha — and they're all here, from how to host a wine-tasting party to instructions on glazing an Easter ham.

Recipe4living.com: All the recipes on this site are listed by category with the number of hits, a quick indication whether something is really good. If you're a fan of celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck, there's a separate section with his recipes. Also, the reference guides (substitutions, storing and selecting food, etc.) are useful.

Recipezaar.com: Everyone is a star at this cooking-community Web site that encourages sharing recipes, celebrating successes and seeking entertaining advice. There are more than 200,000 easily searchable recipes to create your own online recipe box.

www.tablewine.com: No wine scores, no stars, no points — this one's dedicated to affordable wines, generally less than \$20. Highlights include suggestions for food and wine pairings, restaurant corkage fees and how to order wine when you're entertaining at a restaurant. There's also a wine forum where members review wines, post tips on storage and share wine-country travel notes.

Taunton.com/finecooking: Taunton magazine is a winner, and its Web site adds to its appeal. Besides recipes, there are informative articles on buying a roasting pan, using kitchen tools and selecting dessert wines. The test kitchen takes you through skimming fat off pan drippings. And readers offer tips, like storing freshly peeled ginger in the freezer — it keeps longer and can be easily grated, diced or sliced while still frozen.

Dieting

Calorieking.com: This is the place to turn to when you want to know the caloric content of a Big Mac or a Stauffer frozen dinner. Plus, there are tips on dieting, portion control and dealing with loss of self-esteem, emotional eating, body image and other food-related problems. There are some recipes but nothing to get excited about.

Hungrygirl.com: This is a site for those who love to try the latest fad diet, get a rush at the mention of a new fat-free food and always order salad dressing on the side. It's got reviews of diet products, a "hungry girl" glossary and recommendations for low-cal snacks (Tootsie Pops, 94 percent fat-free popcorn minibags, steamed artichoke, etc.).

Miscellaneous

Foodtimeline.org: Where was bananas Foster invented? Find the answer to this and other questions at this food-history and reference service. Run by a reference librarian with a passion for food history, all questions are answered (usually within 24 hours), so it's a terrific resource for students, teachers, novelists, chefs, restaurateurs and food writers. (As for bananas Foster, it was invented at Brennan's Restaurant in New Orleans.)

Grocerylists.org: Part anthropology/part sociology, this collection of 1,100 discarded grocery lists is perversely addictive. (Did the shopper with the crumpled list of floss picks, ketchup, nuts and boerbin (sic) just visit the dentist?)

Hometownfavorites.com: If you thought you'd never see another box of Tuna Helper Alfredo or Andes Baking Chips, you'll be a happy shopper at this site that specializes in hard-to-find food products. Charms, Walnettos and Necco wafers and lots of other old-fashioned and regional candies are there, too, and they can all be shipped anyplace in the world.

Jessicasbiscuit.com: A great resource if you're in the market for cookbooks — both current and out-of-print — with service and prices to match (20 to 75 percent discounts, plus free shipping on orders of \$25 or more). Sure, there are scores of booksellers out there (hello? Amazon.com?), but here they take cookbooks so seriously the company has reprinted out-of-print classics like Nancy Silverton's "Desserts" and Elizabeth David's "English Bread and Yeast Cookery."

Zingermans.com: This Ann Arbor, Mich.-based deli sells the latest ingredients and luxury foods — walnut mustard from France, anchovy-stuffed peppers from Italy, Corbezzolo honey from Sardinia and the famous Poilane bread from Paris. There are also all their house-baked cookies, brownies and breads. Or just sign on and read all the terrific articles on food and travel.

Blogs

By some estimates, there are more than 2 million blogs devoted to food and wine. Scores of them are run by people who want to spout off or wax poetic on a green bean or are desperate for 15 minutes of fame. But many blogs have become essential reading. Here are a few, ranging from serious to humorous:

Brunidigest.blogspot.com: This satirical blog poking fun at New York Times restaurant critic Frank Bruni has become a must-read for foodies nationwide.

Chocolateandzucchini.com: French writer Clotilde Dusoulier's reflections on all things food-related — recipes, cookbook acquisitions, nifty tools, quirky products, restaurant experiences — are sure to get you back in the kitchen or on the phone with your travel agent to book a trip to Paris.

Chowhound.com: Along with co-founder Jim Leff's musings as the "North American on a monumental road trip in search of hyperdeliciousness," this popular site is where the food obsessed turn to for advice on a restaurant recommendation in Dallas; the lowdown on French Hound Bistro in Middleburg, Va.; or whether the Wolf stove lives up to its hype.

Eater.com: Those obsessed with restaurants in New York and L.A. can get the latest info, thanks to the hungry tipsters who feed this site newsy nuggets on openings, closings and other restaurant comings and goings.

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