

Flavor: The Pioneer Woman cooks again

Cookbook focuses on breakfast for dinner, freezer foods, 16-minute meals and comfort classics

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By **Linda A. Ditch**

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For Ree Drummond, what began in 2006 with a blog post featuring a single image of her children working on her Oklahoma ranch has grown into a huge food-driven empire with a down-home feel.

At a recent presentation and book signing in Kansas City, Mo., she noted that 2015 has been particularly busy, with the release of her new cookbook, "The Pioneer Woman Cooks: Dinnertime," filming her Food Network program and launching her kitchenware product line for Walmart.

Plus, the six-week transition of sending her oldest child, Alex, off to Texas A&M wasn't easy. When asked how she was coping, Drummond answered, "Not well. I must not have read enough books on how to send a kid to college to get me to the stage that this doesn't affect me."

Known as "The Pioneer Woman," Drummond began her blog as a way to share thoughts and photos of life on the ranch with family and friends. She caught the attention of readers with her story of being a city girl who fell in love with a cowboy. On the blog, her husband, Ladd, is known as The Marlboro Man.

The blog, Confessions of a Pioneer Woman, is now part of The Pioneer Woman website, with sections on food, books, home schooling, entertainment and lifestyle. However, Drummond noted writing her blog is still close to her heart. She said in the beginning, "I loved that I could wake up, tell a little story, post it and that was that. It is still my favorite way to interact with everyone. We're not all alike, but we appreciate family. We appreciate butter. I think I could have a conversation with all of (the blog readers) for a long time. We could all be friends."

"The Pioneer Woman Cooks: Dinnertime" is Drummond's fourth cookbook. She also wrote a memoir and a line of children's stories featuring her basset hound, Charlie. The cookbook is full of recipes and suggestions to help home cooks with the one meal they often find difficult to manage. The book is divided into sections that include breakfast for dinner, freezer foods, 16-minute meals and comfort classics. There also is a chapter of preparation tips, plus one full of suggestions for stocking the pantry, refrigerator and freezer, which is important for Drummond, considering the nearest small town to the ranch is 20 miles away.

Drummond has four children: two girls and two boys. Are any of them picky eaters?

"The girls are great," she said. "They will eat most anything. Bryce is getting better. He's a football player, so he knows you need to eat to fuel your sport. Now Todd ... Todd would eat Ding Dongs for breakfast, lunch and dinner."

The cookbook is full of photos, all taken by Drummond. Each step in a recipe is illustrated with a photo, just like the recipes found on her blog.

Drummond decided to write "The Pioneer Woman Cooks: Dinnertime" because she felt it was the meal home cooks struggle with the most. However, it is also the meal she considers most important.

"Dinnertime is special because it's that time of day when everyone's coming back together," she said. "There's something to be said about walking into the house and smelling food cooking."

To take the chill off on an autumn evening, try Drummond's recipe for Hamburger Soup. She noted it tastes better the next day, which classifies it as a good make-ahead meal. She also

wrote the vegetables can be adjusted to fit your tastes, and ground turkey can be used instead of beef.

HAMBURGER SOUP

From "The Pioneer Woman Cooks: Dinnertime" © 2015 by Ree Drummond. Reprinted with permission from William Morrow/HarperCollins.

Makes 12 servings

2 1/2 pounds ground chuck or other ground beef

1 large yellow onion, diced

2 celery stalks, diced

3 garlic cloves, minced

One 14.5-ounce can whole tomatoes

1 yellow bell pepper, seeded and diced

1 red bell pepper, seeded and diced

1 green bell pepper, seeded and diced

4 carrots, peeled and sliced on the diagonal

5 large red potatoes, scrubbed and cut into 1-inch chunks

3 cups beef broth, more as needed

3 tablespoons tomato paste

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt, more to taste

1/2 teaspoon black pepper

2 teaspoons dried parsley

1/2 teaspoon ground oregano

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper

In a large pot, combine the meat, onion, celery, and garlic. Cook the mixture over medium-high heat until the meat is totally browned, then drain off and discard as much fat as you can.

Add the tomatoes and their juices, bell peppers, and carrots. Throw in the potatoes, beef stock, tomato paste, salt, black pepper, parsley, oregano and cayenne. Stir everything together, then bring the mixture to a boil.

Reduce the heat, cover the pot, and simmer the soup for 15 to 20 minutes, or until the potatoes are tender but not overly mushy. If the soup is too thick for your taste, just splash in a cup or two of beef broth until it's the consistency you like.

Dish it up and serve it piping hot!

Make ahead

For some reason, this soup always seems to taste better the next day! Feel free to make this ahead of time and store it in the fridge for up to 3 days. If soup is overly thick when reheated, add a little extra beef broth or water to thin it to your liking.

Variations

n Add any veggies you would like to the soup: diced zucchini, corn kernels, cut green beans, or mushrooms.

n Use ground turkey instead of ground beef.

n Add peeled, diced parsnips or peeled, diced butternut squash to the soup.

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