

Moms chicken out on the dinner question

By Esther Baird

Wed Nov 28, 2007, 04:54 PM EST

BEVERLY, MASS. - “Esther, look at this!” my friend hissed at me. She held up a bag of what looked to be cubed chicken. “Looks like cubed chicken,” I stated and took a sip of my wine.

She gestured down at a perfectly formed chicken potpie on the counter in front of her. It was lovely. It had nice, pressed, pastry edges and a shiny, egg-white glaze sealing it all in place.

I amended my statement. “It looks like cubed chicken that ought to be deep within that pot pie.”

She waved the bag of chicken around. “I can’t believe I forgot to put the chicken in my chicken pot pie!”

I could believe it.

I’d already accidentally marinated pork chops with a dressing sauce. Details. Details. Who could keep track of them all? We were carefree and cavalier; we were at a party.

There were nine of us at the local Cummings Center company, “Buying Thyme.” They make cooking fun, mostly because they do the hard stuff for you. My job was to show up, eat some tasty hors d’oeuvres, drink some wine and throw some ingredients — pre-chopped, diced, smashed and mixed — into zippy bags while visiting with my friends. For my effort, I’d leave with great dinners, complete with side dishes, ready-to-cook.

Did I mention that our party was child-free? Did I refer to the fact that the ingredients were fresh, organic and yummy? Did I talk about the chocolate truffle balls they served us?

Best of all, the event answered the crazy-making, teeth-grinding, brain-numbing question: “What’s for dinner?” Or, “What are we having for dinner tonight?” And the ever-popular, “I’m hungry. When is dinner?”

Dinner, dinner, dinner!!

The topic exhausts me before I even get out of bed each morning.

The idea of going to a party and leaving with bags full of dinners sounded fabulous.

And it was. We were thrilled to be out. In fact, we were maybe just a little too chatty while the owner explained the meal prep process. We had each pre-selected around seven meals to assemble. She pointed to six stainless steel cooking spaces and instructed us to follow the mixing instructions and, when done, to seal our completed meals in freezer bags or tins. She cautioned

us to pay attention to the bagging instructions. “Make sure you don’t dump everything into one bag,” she said. “If the recipe calls for say, a sauce, not a marinade, then the sauce would go in one bag and the meat in another.”

We all laughed and pshawed. We knew the difference between a sauce and a marinade – no problem. More cheese quiche girls? Anyone need some more wine?

We set off to our first stations. I was making a chipotle-cranberry pork chop for my first meal. I added all the pre-prepped ingredients for my sauce. Then I pulled out the pork chops from the freezer below my station that was stocked for each specific recipe. I glanced at the instructions. Yep, I was done. A complete meal in nine minutes! Bliss!!

I leaned over my counter to tell my friend a critically important story about a pair of jeans I just purchased and . . . dumped all of my ingredients, pork chops and sauce, into the same bag.

“It’s OK,” my friend whispered. “Who says a sauce can’t double as a marinade?”

“Exactly.”

I glanced at the owner to see if she’d noticed my bagging faux pas. She hadn’t. So, I quickly threw my completed chops onto my designated freezer shelf and transitioned to a new station.

We continued to scoop and mix and bag for about an hour. As we were measuring our ¼ cups of parsley and ½ cups of sautéed carrots, as we were bagging our fresh salmon steaks and pulling out shrimp for the Orzo dish, we chit-chatted about our favorite TV shows, swapped preschool news, and discussed the progression of the future Starbucks on Elliot street.

Ok that last one might have just been me.

Clean bowls and foiled pans appeared as if by magic each time we needed a new one. Finally, once we completed a meal, we slapped a label on it that contained all the thawing and cooking instructions.

Really, it was the easiest thing I’d ever done.

It was also easy to stand next to my friend and hold her hurriedly peeled off pastry squares while she dumped the chicken into her already-made potpie. So we made a few mistakes. Blame it on our sheer giddiness at a night out and the thrill of having seven creative and healthy answers to the. “What’s for dinner?” question.

To answer your ‘what’s for dinner’ question visit: <http://www.buying-thyme.com/>

Note: Esther Baird is a Beverly writer. Her column appears regularly in the Citizen. Please contact Esther with suggestions or comments about The Baird Facts at: esther@estherbaird.com, or visit her Web site at: www.estherbaird.com.

