

# A Fresh Look At Nebraska



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*By LuAnn Schindler*

According to author Thomas Wolfe, "There is no spectacle on earth more appealing than that of a beautiful woman in the act of cooking dinner for someone she loves."

I wonder if Wolfe knew the females in my family.

My mom mixed, tossed and threw ingredients into a pan. She seldom used a measuring cup. The dish would be delicious.

Both of my grandmothers cooked in that manner, too. Grandma Larson baked the best chocolate chip cookies. Nothing compared to the moist melt-in-your-mouth goodness. Grandma Fields made superb pies, but the ultimate delicacy was found in her canning room. Jars of pickled cherries lined the shelves. When we were young, my cousin, Brian, and I would grab a jar and wander around the farm, savoring the sweet-sour combination.

Each of my aunts is known for her specialty: Ginny's popcorn balls, Joyce's cherry fruit salad, Deana's various soup recipes.

Sure, there have been a few failures in the kitchen. The skunk stew incident still causes laughter during family gatherings. And at my house, the mere mention of a certain concoction of lime gelatin, diced cucumbers and mayonnaise elicits a nasty look from Scott.

For me, cooking is an art form. It's self-expression at its tastiest. It's a visual palette where the cook selects each ingredient and molds it into a masterpiece.

The kitchen is where I dabble in art. Sometimes, there's a bonus to being a creative cook.

Last weekend, I was one of five finalists in the Nebraska Beef "What's For Dinner" Cook-off. It's the second time I've made the cut. I prepared beefy taco bells. In other words, I stuffed fresh peppers with taco meat and garnished them cheese, tomatoes, salsa and sour cream. I finished in second place.

I enjoy cooking and sharing. I learned that from the women in my family.

For many families, food is a common bond that brings them together. Look beyond the platter of rib-eyes or the bowl of three bean salad placed in front of you. Glimpse into the kitchen in many homes across Nebraska and you'll find something wonderful happening.

You'll find families spending time together in the kitchen, cooking, creating and conversing.

I learned to cook by spending time in the kitchen. I'd watch my mom, aunts and grandma gather in that room and prepare fantastic meals. I observed how the simple tasks of slicing and dicing cut through more than vegetables; it cut to the heart of the matter – family time.

Cooking is a generational phenomenon.

When my kids grew up, I kept them in the kitchen with me and tried to establish that connection. It wasn't always an easy task; between my school schedule and their activities, we often consumed more spicy nachos, lukewarm hot dogs and bland sloppy joes than home-cooked meals.

But as they got older, they ventured into their great-grandmother's kitchen and watched the magic. And they've learned the secrets of cooking.

Can there be too many cooks in the kitchen?

Not in our family.