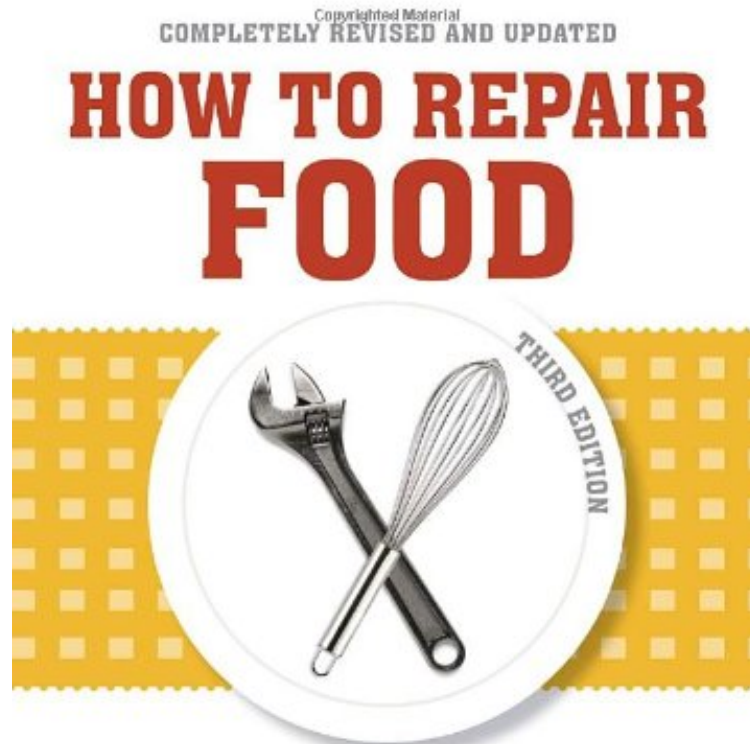


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How to Repair Food, Third Edition

Tanya Zeryck, John Bear, Marina Bear

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The bestselling kitchen classic that tells you what to do when any kind of food or drink is . . .
overcooked, undercooked, stale, burned, lumpy, salty, bland, too spicy, mushy, too dry, too wet, flat, tough, too thick, too thin, wilted, collapsed, curdled, or stuck together.

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Tanya Zeryck, John Bear, Marina Bear : How to Repair Food, Third Edition before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised How to Repair Food, Third Edition:

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THE BEST-LAID PLANS OFTEN GO AWRY . . . especially in the kitchen. When you're faced with one of those inevitable cooking calamities--be it a sinking soufflé, salty soup, or stuck-together pasta--How to Repair Food has the answers and advice you need to get your meal back on track. First published in 1970 and now with more than 100,000 copies in print, this kitchen classic has been completely revised and updated to serve a new generation of home cooks. **NEW TO THE THIRD EDITION:** Hints on lowering fat and sodium. Ways to integrate wholesome and organic ingredients. Tips for reducing kitchen waste. Ideas for coping with holiday and other special-occasion dinner debacles. Filled with witty, accessible, and often ingenious solutions to mishaps that befall even the best of cooks, the alphabetical listings (from Abalone to Zucchini) are designed to rescue any dish from the brink of disaster.

About the Author **TANYA ZERYCK** is a stay-at-home mom who, between reading cookbooks and whipping up culinary delights for her family, is a prolific gardener. Her parents, **JOHN AND MARINA BEAR**, are the authors of *The Something Went Wrong Now What Do I Do Cookbook* (the original edition of *How to Repair Food*) and *Not Your Mother's Cookbook*. John is also the coauthor, with Margaret Fox, of *Caf Beaujolais*, *Morning Food*, and *Evening Food*. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

How to Improve, Bluff, or Otherwise Muddle Through This is the Great Encouragement section. This is the place you turn to when the main course has turned gray, when your dessert won't jell, or when there's a funny smell in the house and you discover that it's coming from the kitchen. Or, more generally, come back to this section when you have a specific problem that isn't covered in the main part of the text. Our message is take heart! When everything seems to be going wrong--or has, in fact, already gone wrong--it is still possible to snatch victory (and your dinner) from the very jaws of defeat and the garbage can. You need only courage, a bit of creativity (yours or ours), and a good set of first aid ingredients for repairing damaged food. Here, then, is our suggestion for a culinary first aid kit, a list of supplies that should equip you to weather a wide variety of kitchen catastrophes. And in case absolutely everything goes wrong, it is even possible to create an entirely satisfactory dinner for four out of emergency supplies you have squirreled away just in case. See Appendix H for details. The first aid items are listed in alphabetical order. Permission is freely granted to add, subtract, or modify to fit your own needs and wishes.

First Aid Supplies artichoke hearts (quartered): If you have room in your freezer, keep a couple of boxes of frozen artichoke hearts in the back corner. They are unusual enough that they look special, and they're one of the few vegetables that stand up well to preserving. If your freezer is full, you can stack a couple of cans of them in the back of the cupboard instead (be sure they're not the marinated kind, which usually come in jars). They make a great addition to a too-small salad and are part of the emergency meal in Appendix H. **baking kit:** Flour, sugar, cocoa, baking powder, salt, vegetable oil, and vanilla. We could have listed each item separately, but these are what you will need for the emergency dessert in Appendix H. They are also generally available in small quantities (in case you don't bake much), last for a very long time, and can be used for other things. Flour is handy for thickening soups and stews and fruit desserts. Sugar? You must keep some on hand if you're going to offer your guests coffee or tea. Cocoa, of course, can be used to make, well, cocoa (which, by the way, is not much harder than using any instant package, and is much tastier). Vanilla adds a homey and very appealing flavor to any dessert. Even if you're just making an instant vanilla pudding, adding some vanilla extract will make it taste more homemade. **baking mix:** There is good, old, reliable Bisquick, which also comes in a reduced-fat version, as well as convenient baking mixes available in your natural food store. With one of these in your pantry, you'll be comforted to know that you aren't more than 13 minutes away from home-baked goods like pancakes, cookies, coffee cake, quickbreads, and biscuits. **baking soda:** Never let your kitchen be without it. Besides its cooking, medicinal, stain-removing, and deodorizing uses (you probably already have an open box of it in the fridge), it is also the ideal kitchen fire extinguisher, especially for grease fires. Simply pour lots on a fire. Note: Trying to douse a grease fire with water will normally only make things worse. **berries (frozen):** Most of the first aid supplies on our list are items that might last you until Y3K without going bad, but this one is different. We recommend keeping on hand frozen berries. They'll only last for a year or so, but if you haven't used them for a while, you'll just have to make some berry pies, a berry sauce for your pancakes or ice cream, berry ice cream to go under your sauce, or some healthful breakfast smoothies. In the meantime, they're very handy to have around to make all those menu items we just mentioned. Nothing is easier while seeming gourmet than a homemade berry sauce for that gallon of ice cream you just pulled out of the freezer. **bouillon cubes:** Any bland soup or stew can be vastly improved with a bouillon cube. Just make sure that, if the dish you're adding it to is at all thick, you've melted the cube in a bit of boiling water first. (Finding a piece of bouillon cube in a mouthful of food is not fun.) And, of course, a bouillon cube is also the start of a pot of soup; just toss in all the sad leftover vegetables at the bottom of the veggie drawer (as well as some of the other things in this list). **capers:** So maybe they're not a usual thing for most people to keep around, but not only are they necessary for the emergency dinner in Appendix H, they offer huge flavor as well. Salty and briny, they add pop to sauces, stews, and many a salad. Mix them with mayo and pickles for a gourmet tartar sauce. Or sauté them in butter to top a fish fillet. Even canned tuna becomes a treat if you mix in a caper or two (or six). Or mix them with that can of shrimp in your emergency supplies for a gourmet snack. **cheese sauce or cheese soup:** One can is instant help for some dry casseroles. Pour it on vegetables. Heat it up and pour it on toast for instant Welsh rarebit. **clam chowder:** Find a good brand that's short on potatoes and long on clams. It makes a

good first course when you're faced with less main course than you need, and it's not bad for snacks or lunch either.

couscous (or rice): Look in the rice section of your store for couscous. Chances are overwhelming that you will find a box of instant couscous, which looks like a grain but is actually a pasta. Buy it and save it, unless you're not familiar with couscous. In that case, buy two and try one. It's a great underneath for meat, fish, or vegetable stews. It's exotic enough that it looks special, but it tastes simple and supportive. Best of all, it cooks in only 5 minutes. If you can't find it (or you or the two-year-old you live with won't try new stuff), then substitute quick-cooking rice, which even comes in brown nowadays.

evaporated milk: Next on your shopping list is a 12-ounce can of evaporated milk. How many times have you run out of milk in the last two years? See? Use evaporated milk anywhere you'd use whole milk--in desserts, sauces, etc.--adding an equal amount of water (so a 12-ounce can makes 3 cups of milk). You can also use it to make a whipped topping. And there are low-fat and fat-free versions, too. Choose your favorite.

food colorings: Here's a big secret: a few drops of yellow in your curried rice or biscuit dough makes it look richer. A pallid soup can be reddened a little and made much more appetizing. (Sure, you could grate a little fresh beet into the soup, but do you have a fresh beet on hand? Fine. Then use food coloring instead.) And then there's the blue mashed potatoes and the green scrambled eggs the kids are still telling their friends about.

garbanzo beans: Also known as chickpeas, these beans are one of the very few kinds of vegetable matter that are not diminished by the canning process. They are great salad and main-course enhancers, because they're filling and nutritious and interesting looking while being fairly bland and adaptable, tastewise.

gelatin (unflavored): For thickening cool things, unflavored gelatin works wonders. Soften a package in 1/4 cup cold water and add it to 1 cup warm liquid to dissolve it. Then add it to aspic, pudding, cooked pie filling, or whatever. It will even rescue a soggy croquette, if that's your problem (see CROQUETTES). It is also a pretty good start for a lot of fancy desserts. Check any good cookbook or just improvise.

hollandaise sauce (canned or packaged): These days, you don't need much. Everybody knows it's sinfully rich and difficult to make, so a graceful dollop over insufficient vegetables can make a big difference. The same goes for fish and eggs. Use it straight, or add a pinch of tarragon and you have a basic version of barnaise sauce for meat, fish, or vegetables. Add some tomato sauce (2 teaspoons per little can or packet of hollandaise) and you have Choron sauce for eggs or meat. Add 1 1/2 teaspoons grated orange zest and 2 tablespoons orange juice and you have Maltaise sauce, which will turn the most tasteless fish or vegetable into something exotic.

hot pepper sauce: Is there anything, with the possible exception of a hot fudge sundae--and even then we're not sure--that isn't improved by a shake of Tabasco?

lemon juice: Keep a bottle of the reconstituted stuff in your fridge. Lemon juice livens up older vegetables and doubtful fishes. Use it whenever something is darkening that shouldn't, such as fruit slices, avocados, or parsnips. If you don't want the finished product to have a lemony taste, rinse whatever it is under gently running cold water before continuing. You can even make lemonade for unexpected company.

lentils: You can purchase these already cooked and canned or dry (in which case they cook up in half an hour or so). We prefer dried, as they are a nice way to thicken a soup (they suck up a lot of liquid during cooking). They can even be the soup. Cook them in broth rather than water to give them a nice flavor. Throw in some sautéed veggies (onion, carrot, and celery) and you have dinner. Cook them with less broth so they're more stewish and toss in some potato and sausage and you've got another dinner. Cook them in even less broth and toss with vinaigrette and you've just fancied up your salad.

olives (black, preferably kalamata): A bowl of olives is an instant appetizer. Mixed black and green (if you have them) looks good. If you'd like to make your kalamatas fancier, you can marinate them in olive oil with some garlic (roasted is nice), red pepper flakes, and herbs (try chives, basil, or cilantro). Or they can be processed with some garlic, capers, and olive oil for a tapenade (serve with crackers). They elevate a simple salad to something much more interesting. Chopped, they add flavor and texture to sauces, stews, hummus, and pasta dishes.

onions (dried): No one ever expects to run out of fresh onions, yet everyone does at least 4.7 times a year. Dried onions are a natural for helping fill out anemic soups and stews (add 2 tablespoons sautéed dried onions for each cup of liquid). They will add flavor to almost any bland vegetable, make an interesting topping for a casserole when combined with crushed potato chips or cornflakes, or even make blah sandwiches unexpectedly good (how about dried onions, browned or not, with cheese, or peanut butter, or tuna fish?).

parmesan cheese (grated): The ideal hurry-up topping, Parmesan hides a multitude of sins when used as a topping for a casserole and tastes good on most cooked vegetables, fish, and poultry. Don't forget a good sprinkling on a salad that needs something.

pasta: Keep some dried pasta on hand. For the dinner in Appendix H, we recommend angel hair, but having any pasta around can help you out. You can use pasta to extend a meal you don't have enough of: elbows turn chili into chili mac; with ditalini, orzo, or other small shapes, vegetable soup becomes minestrone; a salad supplemented with farfalle is an entrée (perhaps with some garbanzos for protein). Of course, it also makes a main dish on its own, with plain old tomato sauce and Parmesan, or with a number of other things on this list (garbanzos, artichokes, and shrimp come to mind).

potato flakes: Mashed potato flakes are not just for making mashed potatoes. They are a fast and nutritious thickener for soups and stews. Just add them by the handful until you've got the consistency you want. They are also a great extender for most vegetables. Chop up the vegetable (for instance, carrots, beans, or broccoli) after it is cooked and well drained. Combine it with an equal amount of reconstituted mashed potatoes. Top this with Parmesan cheese and run it under the broiler for 2 to 3 minutes, until the top is browned.

sherry (either dry or amontillado): Like hollandaise, sherry is a gourmet touch that can turn a disaster into a triumph. It makes any stew, soup, or casserole

taste richer. Start with 2 tablespoons in a four- to six-person potful, let it simmer (or bake) for a few minutes, and taste. You can sprinkle it on a variety of desserts, from pudding to cake. And you can always serve it straight (or over ice) to your starving guests while you're busy patching up things in the kitchen.

shrimp (canned): This is the basis for any number of emergency responses. It can be added to soup, salad, or casserole. It can inspire quick appetizers or make a good sandwich filling or a late-night snack.

spices and herbs: You can add basic spices or herbs to almost anything with some likelihood of improvising it, or at least making it more interesting. Everybody has his or her own basics. Ours are the following:

- chile powder** (try it in entrees as well as in desserts and drinks)
- curry powder** (fines herbes (the herb blend by this name generally includes parsley, chives, tarragon, and chervil)
- garlic salt or powder** (powder is stronger; salt is saltier)
- Italian herbs** (such as dried basil, oregano, and rosemary)
- freshly ground black pepper** (pepper flakes (gives most anything a kick)

We've recently found a Thai spice mix (made by Spice Islands) that does nice and unexpected things to savory dishes and a Cajun spice powder (Luzianne Cajun Seasoning) that is so good that it might be addictive.

The basic rule of thumb when using herbs and spices is to add 1/4 teaspoon for each pound of ingredients, and then start tasting. Use this amount throughout this book unless we advise otherwise or your own preferences say something else. Some foods will require much more spice than this; others will need less, especially if you use strongly flavored spices like cloves and saffron. Improvise and experiment with whatever you have on hand. And write down what you do, in case you come up with something great.

tomatoes (canned diced, pure, paste): Tomatoes can be added to soups and stews to give them some flavor and color, as well as to add substance when you don't have enough. They can also be used as the basis for a simple but satisfying sauce (as in the emergency dinner). Tomato puree is but a few herbs and some garlic away from becoming a sauce. Diced tomatoes are a nice addition to a rice dish, which can become Mexican or Mediterranean or Indian depending on the herbs you add. Tomato paste can be added to many sauces to liven them up, from Thai peanut sauce to many stir-fry sauces, to gravy. Canned tomatoes can be a far better option than tasteless fresh tomatoes in the dead of winter.

tomatoes (sun-dried): If you can find the kind packed in olive oil, get those. The oil can be used in a salad dressing or a pasta sauce. Otherwise, purchase them in a plastic pouch and leave it unopened until you really need them. Since vegetables that can survive in your pantry in the long term are hard to find, you should get to know these. They taste good, and they're sort of the pimiento of the modern age, adding the cherry-red bits in casseroles, the spot of color in the garnish, and the interesting flavor in the emergency meal salad.

vanilla pudding (instant): A dessert's salvation. You can pad skimpy pie fillings by using the pudding as a base layer, with the fruit on top. You can use it as a sauce over insufficient quantities of fruit desserts or cake. You can even use it, we are told, to make vanilla pudding.

vinaigrette: You should always have a salad dressing, or some good olive oil and vinegar so that you can make some. Almost any vegetable can be made into a salad in a pinch. You may ordinarily keep some of these things on hand. Buy the others and tuck them away in an emergency corner of the cupboard. They all have a very long shelf life. Sometimes true happiness is remembering that you have a can of chickpeas stashed away.

Let us repeat, because we cannot say it often enough: improvise! That is the key to success when something goes wrong. Think of it this way: what have you got to lose? As far as we know, there are no two foods that, when mixed together, will explode. The worst thing that can happen is that a partial disaster may be converted into a total disaster--perhaps even a glorious disaster, one your grandchildren will remember and discuss with awe. And you may have surprising success. Look, if the Mexicans can serve poultry with chocolate sauce and the Uruguayans can improve a steak by spreading peanut butter on it, surely there is something you can do with the quivering mass in your kitchen that looks like the poster from *Invasion of the Killer Casseroles*.

Total Failure When you have a total, absolute, cannot-be-corrected, you've-tried-to-improvise-and-only-made-it-worse failure, there are three, and only three, paths open to you. The first is to run yourself through with your sword. This may seem a bit extreme for a culinary bungle, but there is good historical precedent: the case of Francois Vtel, steward to the French minister of finance under Louis XIV, whom many still regard as one of the top ten chefs of all time. One day King Louis XIV came calling. Vtel prepared a great meal, but the king's party was larger than expected and there wasn't enough food to go around. Some had to make do with boiled eggs or the like. Vtel was disconsolate, but he vowed to redeem himself the following day, which happened to be a Friday. Fresh fish was a rarity in those days, and Vtel had placed orders with fishermen throughout the region. Late that night he was called to the kitchen to accept delivery from one of the fishermen. He did not realize that this was only a small part of his order. Is that all there is? he asked in disbelief. Yes, he was mistakenly told. One failure was enough. Two in a row were literally unbearable. Vtel went up to his room and ran himself through with his sword. He was found dead a short time later, when someone came to tell him that the rest of the fish had arrived. Now, whatever you've done, it can't be that bad, can it? So please, do not run yourself through with your sword. For that matter, don't even jab yourself with your shrimp deveiner. Try alternative two or three. The second alternative is to whip up a gourmet meal in twenty minutes, start to finish, from a simple set of ingredients you already have on hand. This is entirely possible, but only if you have the emergency ingredients described a few pages back. If you believed us when we suggested you keep a kitchen first aid kit on hand, turn now to Appendix H, and you will find a pretty good dinner for four that can be made from scratch in a mere 1,800 seconds. Don't forget to replace any emergency ingredients you may use. We don't want to sound too pessimistic, but, as Mrs. Vtel may well have said to her husband on Thursday night, Sleep well, Francois; who knows what may happen tomorrow? The final alternative

is to give up entirely and let someone else do the cooking. In other words, go out to dinner. You can deal with the kitchen disaster tomorrow, which is, as Scarlett O'Hara said, another day.

ABALONE: see also **FISH AND SEAFOOD**

tough: After it has been cooked and you find yourself faced with several rejected portions of (terribly expensive) abalone chewing gum, you can still produce abalone chowder. Very elegant.

Abalone Chowder
3/4 to 1 pound tough abalone
4 slices bacon, diced
1 onion, minced
1 potato, diced
1 bottle (8 ounces) clam juice
3 cups milk, or 2 cups milk plus 1 cup half-and-half
2 tablespoons sherry (optional)
Salt and pepper

Was this your usual breaded slice of abalone? If so, scrape off as much of the breading as you can (but no need to get it all; it will help thicken the soup). Mince the abalone (a food processor will help). Cook the bacon, stirring, in a saucepan until crisp. Remove and reserve the bacon. Put the onion and potato in the bacon fat in the saucepan and cook until the onions are golden. Add the abalone, clam juice, milk, bacon, and sherry. Heat to a simmer and cook for 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Serve in warmed bowls.

Next time, you've got to tenderize it more thoroughly. There are two schools of thought on tenderizing. The first says to slice it as thin as you can into big oval slices and then pound it with a meat-tenderizing hammer until you can read a newspaper through it. The gentle persuasion school says that after trimming off the inedible bits, you should slice off the handle (where it was attached to the shell). You now have two pieces of abalone. Wrap one in a clean kitchen towel and pound it, firmly but not violently, with a rolling pin, working from one end to the other until it relaxes. This can take a while. Check to be sure you're not whomping it to bits in there. Then do the other piece. Then slice it on the diagonal into 1/8-inch strips. Good luck.

AGAVE SYRUP need some, have none: You can substitute honey, maple syrup, or corn syrup in your baking. In place of 1/2 cup agave, use 1/2 cup honey or maple syrup. You may have to adjust amounts if you are making a large batch of something. Substitute 3/4 cup corn syrup for 1/2 cup agave, but reduce the other liquids in the recipe by a couple tablespoons. Using sugar in place of agave syrup is not recommended because of the difference in moisture, but if you must, you'll need more sugar (1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons to every 1/2 cup of agave) and you may need to up the liquid in your recipe by 2 or 3 tablespoons. (Please don't blame us if the texture isn't great. We did say it wasn't recommended.)