

BETTER THAN A BOX

Free Preview

how to transform
processed food recipes into

WHOLE FOOD FAVORITES



BY KATIE KIMBALL
KitchenStewardship.com

Thank you for viewing this sample of Better Than a Box!

If you love cooking with whole foods but miss your old favorites, this book is for you.

Better Than a Box is more than just a recipe book – it's a tutorial in real food cooking, reverse engineering processed foods, and creative recipe development.

You'll learn step-by-step processes to transform your own family-favorite recipes by ditching the boxes and cans and using 100% real food. Through demonstrations of successful recipe remakes and the extensive section of basic recipes, your "Reverse Engineering" toolbox will be well stocked, and you'll be inspired to take courage in the kitchen.

We leave no can of cream of mushroom untouched.

No box of Stovetop Stuffing is safe.

Buy the complete copy of *Better Than a Box* now! Go here to buy the ebook:
kitchenstewardship.com/BTAB

Thanks for looking!

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Dad's Cheeseburger Helper

{Reverse Engineering 101}

When we first began the journey to real food, we didn't cut the boxed dinners right away. My husband and son had a "Boys' Night" tradition and always made Hamburger Helper together. When our basement stockpile of boxes finally ran out, I couldn't bring myself to buy the processed stuff anymore, but I knew I had to do something to save Boys' Night.

Ingredients

If you've ever read a box of Hamburger Helper, you'll know that pretty much every ingredient needs to be transformed except the meat you add yourself. HH has the trifecta of evil processed foods all in one box:

- trans fat
- high fructose corn syrup
- white flour

Add a little MSG and a few preservatives to the mix, and you've got dinner. NOT acceptable.

Evaluation

I knew it wouldn't be too hard to work with the

Main flavors:

- beef
- tomato sauce
- cheese

but I wasn't sure about the proportions of water to pasta to make it all cook up in one pot. Something about asking the boys to make a sauce in one pot and cook pasta in the other smacked of "let's just make spaghetti," which I was informed would not preserve the Boys' Night tradition closely enough.

The process:

I searched on the Internet and asked on Facebook (always a great strategy if you have like-minded friends) for one-pot meals that included pasta and ground beef. The one I used as a jumping off point back in 2009 isn't even online anymore, which means I don't know precisely what changes I made other than the ketchup.

I was honestly planning to allow the half cup of ketchup that the recipe called for, high-fructose corn syrup and all, since we were taking such a big step in the right direction. Luck would have it that I had already opened a big can of tomato sauce two days before for another recipe, and my good meal planning skills were telling me, "Use it up!"

I decided to instruct the boys to use tomato sauce instead, and we added a little garlic powder to make up for any loss of flavor. My husband doesn't like sweet flavors with his meat anyway, so I felt safe in not adding any sweetener, which I would typically do when reverse engineering ketchup.

I nervously wrote up the directions on brightly colored paper and even got out all the ingredients to assist the boys in keeping it as simple as possible.

The results? Two very happy men who didn't mind having *homemade* hamburger helper become a regular occurrence. (Phew!)

Making it even better:

I knew my husband was really on board when he began to do some recipe adjusting of his own: "I think it would be even better with bacon."

Takeaway

- Hamburger Helper does not use any sort of magic pasta that cooks perfectly in the pot and soaks up all the water; any pasta can do that.
- Ketchup in recipes is highly over rated. Tomato sauce did great!
- As usual, it's really all about the cheese...

See the finished recipe on p. 155.

If you're interested in other one-pot meals and some reverse engineered "box" mixes, check out over a dozen other bloggers' contributions to this "Hamburger Helper Style Homemade Meals" carnival (<http://bit.ly/aDy6AT>).

Dad's Cheeseburger Helper

LOW *Work Intensity*

✓ *CSA Greens?*

✓ *One-pot Option?*

Prep Foods:

- thaw ground beef
- shred cheese

Equipment:

- large pot with lid

You do not need a box to make a simple meat-and-pasta meal, and you do not have to cook the pasta separately. Husbands can make this recipe without stress, and kids love to help Dad in the kitchen. Start a new routine where Mom puts her feet up once a week and watches the magic.

Ingredients

- 1 lb. ground beef
- ½-1 tsp. black pepper
- ½ tsp. salt (or more to taste)
- 1 tsp. onion powder or 2-3 tsp. onion flakes
- ¼ tsp. garlic powder (or 1 clove minced garlic)
- 1 ¼ c. tomato sauce
- hefty squirt of mustard (1 Tbs.) OR ½-1 tsp. ground mustard powder + ½ tsp. white vinegar
- 1 ¾ c. water (only 1 ½ c. for GF pasta)
- 2 ½ c. short pasta (whole wheat works fine, any shape)
- 2 c. shredded sharp cheddar cheese

GF **Gluten FREE**

 **Egg FREE**

Method

In a wide-bottomed pot with a lid, brown and drain beef.

Stir in pepper, salt, onion powder, garlic, tomato sauce, and mustard.

Pour in water and pasta and bring to a boil.

Reduce heat to low, then cover and simmer 10-15 minutes, stirring occasionally until the water is absorbed and the pasta is tender.

Turn the heat off and stir in cheese. If not serving immediately, keep heat on low because the cheese will cool it down considerably.

Serves 4 adults.

See the reverse engineering tutorial and the original processed recipe on p. 51.



Timesaver: Browning 3-5 pounds of ground beef and freezing in half-pound or one-pound packages is always a brilliant way to move dinner along more quickly.

Make-ahead Instructions: This recipe is so simple, the only thing you could possibly do ahead is brown the beef, shred the cheese, and measure the spices.

How to Reheat: Add a little water to a pot and reheat over medium heat until you see bubbles, then stir and give it a few minutes on low heat, stirring once a minute or so. You can also spread the pasta into a casserole dish and bake at 350F for 20-30 minutes or until bubbly. Cover for the first 20 minutes. However, we haven't had leftovers with this meal since we had four eaters! A double batch might be a good idea...

How to Freeze: Since pasta doesn't freeze beautifully, I wouldn't recommend freezing this dish. If you really want a freezer meal out of it, you could brown the beef, add seasoning, tomato sauce, and water, and freeze that in a glass jar. Freeze the cheese separately, and make a note of how much pasta to add. *To prepare:* Thaw sauce completely. Pour it into a pot with the dry pasta, bring to a boil and simmer on low, covered, for 15 minutes. Watch to make sure there's enough water to cook the pasta; it may need an additional splash as things are cooking. Add cheese and serve.

Variations

- GF ↓ *Gluten-free instructions:* Use gluten-free pasta (tested with brown rice pasta) and reduce the water by a 1/4 c. to avoid mushiness. If things are still too sticky for your liking, try boiling the liquids first, then adding the pasta, returning to a boil briefly, then starting the cook time after turning the heat to low. Jovial Foods sells a very well-sourced GF pasta: <http://bit.ly/We5jbE>
- ↓ *Substitution ideas:* You can add just about any vegetable to the mix to make it a truly one-pot meal. Try a bag of frozen mixed veggies for convenience or add peppers, mushrooms, real onion, and greens for a more culinary experience.
- ↓ Substitute beef broth for the water for added nutrition.
- ↓ Use this recipe as a jumping off point for reverse engineering your favorite flavor of the box with the puffy white "helpful" gloved hand on it. Bacon Cheeseburger? Everyone knows anything is better with bacon. Taco flavored? Cut the mustard, add taco seasoning, and use a Mexican blend cheese. Italian? Cut the mustard, use Italian seasoning with perhaps extra oregano and garlic, extra sliced tomatoes on top and mozzarella cheese. The world outside the box is yours.

FAQS

- ↓ *Could rice be used in place of the pasta?* I've never tried it, but my guess would be that it's worth a try – but it would include an element of risk. Rice is fussy about having the exact amount of water to cook it perfectly. I would start with the water and tomato sauce proportions from the Mexican Beans and Rice on p. 168 and see how it worked with the ground beef and seasoning. To make a thicker sauce, I recommend adding more tomato sauce after the rice is completely cooked and simply cooking another 10 minutes for the flavors to get through the tomato sauce.

The easiest method would be to use already cooked rice, about 4 cups, and just make the sauce, skipping the water. Mix it all together, and voila! Dinner. If you really want to cook the rice in with the sauce, you could also search online for homemade versions of rice-based Hamburger Helper and use those proportions but these seasonings.

- ↓ *Can I cut the meat?* Whether serving a vegetarian or just watching the budget, sometimes a pound of grassfed, organic meat for a meal is too much. You can absolutely cut half the meat out and it's still delicious. Fill in the half pound with a cup or two of cooked lentils if you wish, but it's not necessary. For a vegetarian version, try 3-4 cups cooked lentils or cooked white or kidney beans.

Train your children young to have a healthy fear of the hot stove, and by age three they should be able to stand on a chair (with very close supervision) and help with every part of this meal. My little ones liked to hold the measuring spoons while I poured spices and “dump it in!” when they were told to. Here are some pictures of my husband and then-four-year-old son hard at work at the stove: <http://bit.ly/2tWJ9X> We teach them to hold onto the oven *handle*, where you’d hang hand towels. That’s the one place they’re allowed to touch/rest, and we remind them *every single time* about that rule, how hot everything gets, and how responsible we’re trusting them to be. Also emphasize the importance of always holding the handle of a pot or pan while stirring.



Homemade Wheat Thin Style Crackers

Ingredients:

- 1 ¼ c. whole wheat flour (spelt flour, traditional whole wheat or white whole wheat)
- 1 ½ Tbs. honey or any other sweetener, liquid or granulated
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. paprika
- 4 Tbs. butter or coconut oil or lard or palm shortening
- ¼ c. water
- ¼ tsp. vanilla
- salt for topping

Method:

Combine the whole wheat flour, granulated sweetener (if using), salt and paprika in a medium bowl. Using a pastry blender or two butter knives, cut the fat thoroughly into the dry mixture until it looks like large crumbs, no bigger than a pea. Some people use a food processor to cut in the fat, but I prefer to save dishes and keep it all in one bowl. Combine the water, vanilla, and honey (if using) in a measuring cup, and add to the flour mixture. Mix well until combined, but only until the dough comes together, to assure the most tender crackers.

Roll one quarter or up to half the dough at a time, depending on how large your baking surface will be and how thin you can get the dough. Use parchment paper or an ungreased baking stone to roll. Cover all your surfaces with flour and roll the dough as evenly as you can. You might flip the dough to make it easier to roll, but I don't always have to. Keep rolling until the dough is as thin as humanly possible without tearing. Use a pizza cutter or sharp knife and cut the dough into squares or triangles, about 1 ½ inches each. Fork pokes make them look extra authentic.

Make sure your oven is preheated to 400F. If you have used parchment paper, just slide it onto a cookie sheet. Sprinkle the squares lightly with salt. Repeat with the remaining pieces of dough.

Bake the crackers, one sheet at a time, until crisp and browned, 5 to 10 minutes. (If you want to bake two trays at once, you can position your racks on the very top and bottom of the oven, and switch the trays halfway through the baking time.) As the thinner crackers on the edges begin to brown, remove them and return the remaining crackers to the oven to finish baking. These crackers bake quickly, so watch them closely – sometimes 30 seconds can turn them from golden brown to toast!

More tips, photos, and variations, including the “perfectly crispy crackers trick” here: <http://bit.ly/d099e1>.

Gluten-free variation: Simply use a GF flour blend + ¼ tsp. xanthan gum to make successful gluten-free crackers with this recipe.

If you liked these recipes, you'll love [Better Than a Box](#)

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You'll learn step-by-step processes to transform your own family-favorite recipes by ditching the boxes and cans and using 100% real food. Through demonstrations of successful recipe remakes and the extensive section of basic recipes, your "Reverse Engineering" toolbox will be well stocked, and you'll be inspired to take courage in the kitchen.

Buy Better Than a Box Now

About The Author

I'm Katie Kimball, a Catholic wife and mother of three who wants the best of nutrition and living for her family. My educational background is actually in elementary education and English, but as I began cooking for my children and reading about nutrition, I quickly became a home chef and researcher. In early 2009 I began my journey as an online writer, and I'm head over heels in love with the tangled web that is the blogging career.



I believe that God calls us to be good stewards of all His gifts as we work to feed our families: time, finances, the good green earth, and of course, our healthy bodies. KitchenStewardship.com seeks to share with others ways to balance all four and be prayerful in the call to vocation in the kitchen.

I'm far from perfect: my kitchen is often a mess, I lose my patience with family members, and I certainly spend too much time on the computer. But I do my best to provide optimal nutrition and health for my loved ones, which means I spend a lot of time in the kitchen. I make everything from scratch and talk about food all the time. I also strive to make things taste good, which is where you benefit. Thank you so much for downloading this freebie!

What if Your Kids Could Be Make These Recipes By Themselves?

Learn about how Katie taught her kids how to cook and then created the [Kids Cook Real Food eCourse](#).