

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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When the balance in the checkbook says we need to pinch pennies but we don't want to pinch our family meals, one solution can be to purchase less expensive cuts of meat. A savings of up to several dollars a pound can make a significant difference in the bill at the checkout line. But cooking that meat with your usual methods can leave you with a significantly different meal too.

Often the less expensive cuts of meat are less tender. It may be that the meat came from an older animal with less fat, or it may be the part of the animal that it came from. The parts of a cow that do the most work, that carry the most weight, are usually the toughest. Shoulder, chuck, blade and brisket come from the front leg area. Rump, round, and ham (from pigs) cuts come from the rear leg areas. These pieces will be tougher because they have more strong connective tissue. They also have less fat.

Connective tissue makes meat tough. Fat in meat helps to tenderize it. That's why well marbled meat is both more tender and more expensive, think tenderloin and T-bones. With fat streaked throughout the piece all the meat becomes tender when it's cooked. Without fat, cooked protein and connective tissue can become, as the saying goes 'tough as shoe leather'. Cooked properly, these are also the parts that have the deepest meaty flavor, since much flavor comes from these same proteins.

The trick is cooking the meat enough to break down the tough fibers instead of making them shrink and get tougher, without the benefit of fat inside. Of course you

can grind or chop the meat into little pieces, or pound it flat and thin. Both will tenderize tough meat. But we don't always want to eat 'burgers or meatloaf. What else can you do?

Probably the oldest way of getting around the tough dry problem is making a stew. Cooked in slow, moist heat, a tough chunk of beef brisket can become a tender dish of flavorful stew. The long slow cooking with moisture allows the tough fibers to basically melt into the meat, and the meat melts in your mouth. Grandmother's Sunday pot roast was another good example of slow, moist cooking.

Centuries ago cooks recognized that other ingredients in the stew could make meat even softer. Specifically, using wine or vinegar as part of the moisture speeded up the softening. Acid in these liquids helps to break apart the proteins. So instead of tying themselves into tough ropes, the fibers break down and soften. They also release more flavor into the dish and absorb flavors from the sauce.

The next step was marinating meats in wine or vinegar before cooking. These days we use marinades as much for adding flavor as for tenderizing, but they can be used very effectively to make leaner, less expensive meat as tender as tenderloin. This is an example of when more is not better however. Marinating meat too long can break the fibers apart so much that it becomes soft and mushy. Timing is especially important with marinades that use pineapple, papaya, kiwis or ginger because these all have enzymatic meat tenderizers that break down the protein faster. Follow the recipe.

Here's a newer version of Grandmother's pot roast. The acid in this recipe is a cola soda. The sugar in the cola will also help the meat brown and enhance the flavor. You can shred the meat and serve in buns, or slice and serve on a plate. Enjoy!

Chuck Roast, Barbecue Style

2 pound chuck roast, trimmed	2 onions, chopped
3/4 Cup cola soda	1 Tbsp apple cider vinegar
3/4 Cup Worcestershire sauce	2 cloves garlic, minced
1 tsp beef bouillon granules	1/2 tsp dry mustard
1/2 tsp chili powder	1/4 tsp ground red pepper
1/2 Cup ketchup	2 tsp margarine or butter

Place roast and onions in 4 quart slow cooker or Dutch oven. Combine soda, vinegar, Worcestershire sauce, garlic, bouillon granules, mustard, chili powder and red pepper in small bowl and mix well. Put 1/2 cup of mixture in small jar and refrigerate for sauce.

Pour rest over meat. Cover and cook on High in slow cooker for 6 hours, or bake at 300 to 325° F, or simmer on stove top for 3-4 hours, until tender. When tender remove meat from pot and keep warm. Add pot juices to reserved sauce along with ketchup and margarine and heat to simmer. Slice meat and serve with sauce, or shred meat, mix with sauce, and serve on buns. Serves 6.

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