

Lockdown recipes

Joy Zhang shares the meals that have sustained her during Shanghai's lockdown

The COVID-19 pandemic changed my interactions with food. I used to eat out a lot without leaving myself much of a chance to cook at home. But the combination of the prolonged stay at home orders issued by the city of Shanghai and Cook China's work from home plans that began in mid-March made me think of some ways to feed myself in a more healthy, sustainable, and a less boring way (at least for now).

I have to admit up front that I'm not a cooking master at all and I can never come up with any solid recipes that detail out the needed grams, temperatures, or time. However, if you are interested in getting some inspirations from a beginner about quick and easy cooking, you can read on and take a look at some of my tips for lockdown recipes.

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▲ **Joy Zhang**, a Corporate Communications specialist at Cook China, traveling in Ningxia Province, China.

Start the morning with something filling

I like to start my morning with something filling. Working from home spares us the commute time and leaves more time to prepare a nice breakfast. While I am not necessarily a morning person, I find having a filling breakfast is one of the most comforting and rewarding things for a long morning.

Bottle gourd pancakes are something I enjoy, and if accompanied with milk or soy milk, nothing could be better.

Items needed:

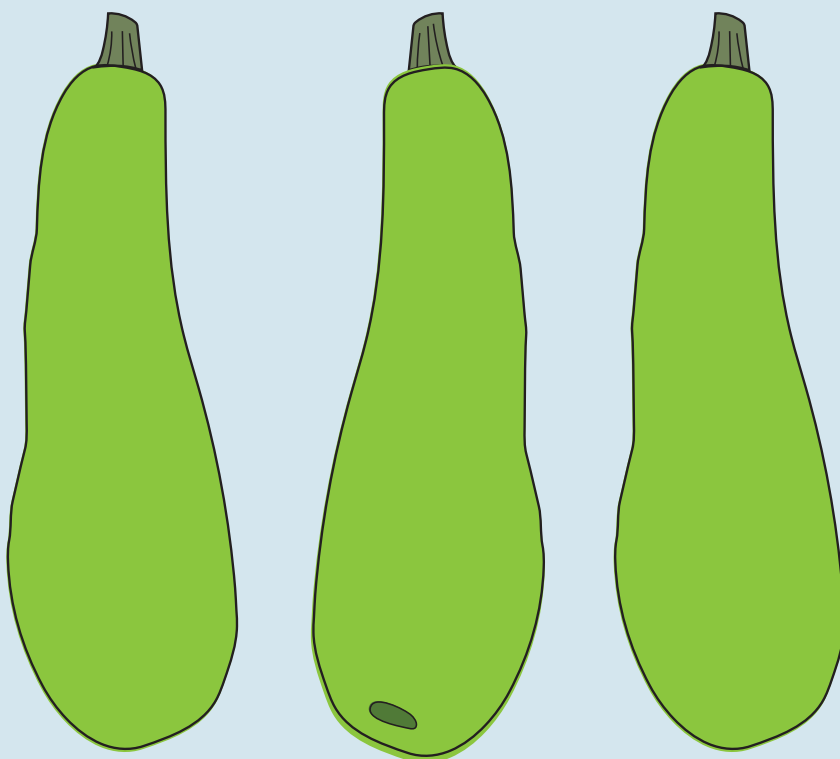
Bottle gourd
Eggs
Salt
Flour
Water if needed

Cooking instructions:

- ▶ Beat the egg(s), add a pinch of salt, and then mix them in the flour with some water if needed to make a smooth and slightly flowing batter.
- ▶ Heat the batter on a medium-low temperature, making sure it heats up in the pan slowly so it won't get too brown or overcooked.
- ▶ Spread the batter out on a pan and give the pan a tilt so that the batter can flow to the edge of the pan.
- ▶ Add the chopped gourd filling. When the batter begins to set, check to see if it needs to be flipped over. When ready, flip it over and let the other side of the pancake cook for a bit before enjoying.



▲ Bottle gourd pancake.



▲ An example of a bottle gourd.

Use what you have and don't be afraid to create something new

Because purchasing or ordering food online has been difficult during lockdown, I do not want to waste anything. So, I usually just open the fridge, quickly review what I have in stock, and think up a possible dish on the spot.

Lunch is regarded as one of the most important meals of the day because it provides energy and nutrition. So, my primary considerations for a lunch are how to make it balanced with nutrition, enriched with layers of flavor so that I will not get bored, and enough calories to keep me energized. The broccoli, shrimp, and black kerneled rice dish, as well as the veggie bowl and rice with homemade sausage dish, were conjured with these considerations in mind.

Broccoli and shrimp is a typical match according to my mom. I would say that she is a traditionalist when it comes to Chinese food, or more specifically when it comes to the cooking styles of Lu'an City, Anhui Province, where I'm originally from. China is a country with so many different styles of cuisines. Black kerneled rice is also a good choice when I want to have something more diverse than just white rice.

My mom did not seem very interested in the veggie bowl, which includes bell peppers, black mushrooms, and dried tofu. She simply commented that it was too much. I understood where she was coming from because in her own cooking, she leans more toward the classic matches, such as cabbage with tofu, beef stew with potatoes, and pork slices fried with green peppers. My approach of just mashing everything up without much regard for time-honored cooking styles seemed a bit out of place for her. However, when I explained that I was trying to ensure the intake of proteins from the tofu, vitamins from the various peppers, and dietary fiber from the black mushrooms, as well as create a more balanced flavor, she became less reluctant. She said, "If it tastes good, you cook what you like." (Yes, mom—and to anyone interested—it does not taste bad.)

If you want to try this type of veggie bowl, I would love to share the below tips:

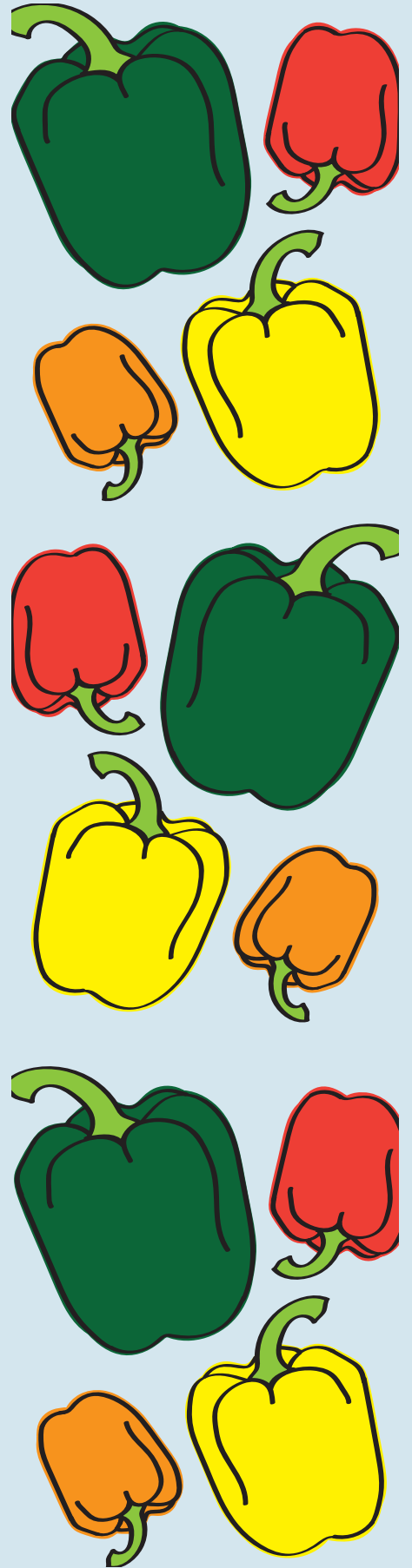
- ▶ It is best to choose different colors of bell peppers because the color varieties help to make the whole dish looks more appetizing.
- ▶ Before you begin adding the peppers, mushrooms, and tofu to your pan, there are a couple things to consider:
 - It is good to be aware that garlic can spice up the whole dish. If you like the flavor of garlic, you can stir fry the garlic ahead of the other ingredients.
 - Adding the tofu before the other ingredients, and thus cooking it longer, can give it a richer flavor.
- ▶ Stir up all the ingredients. Keep the heat at a medium or medium-low level. If the pan is too hot, the peppers may get overcooked easily.
- ▶ Vinegar and soy sauce are two common ingredients that we use for this type of cooking in China. You can add these to your dish. The amount added is up to you.



▲ Broccoli, shrimp, and black keneled rice.



▲ Veggie bowl with rice and sausage.



Make it a light meal

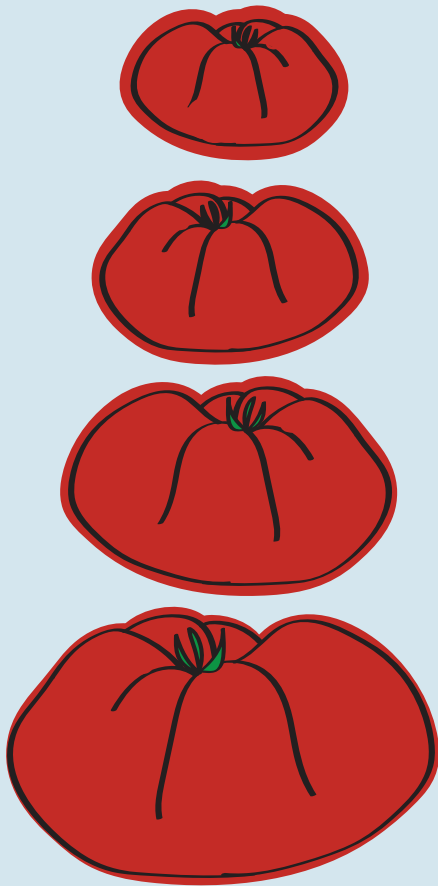
We tend to blame inactivity and less exercises on the lockdown. After a long day of working, we may need a light meal to satiate ourselves with something savory to make a contented transition into our evening sleep time. Tomato and egg noodles are something that can serve that purpose. Simple steps are as follows:

- ▶ First, cook a sunny-side up egg
- ▶ Stir fry chopped tomatoes and add some soy sauce or salt to give more flavor.
- ▶ Cover the tomatoes with water and when the water begins to bubble, put your noodles and the already fried egg in the water.
- ▶ The noodles are ready when they become soft and stretchy. If you like soft noodles, you may want to give them some more cooking time. Just follow your own preferences.

I hope my meal ideas can inspire you to create something of your own!



▲ Joy's tomato and egg noodle dish.



▲ Joy and her mother at home.

Want more recipes?

If you are interested in learning to make Chinese food, I recommend that you subscribe to the YouTube channel Magic Ingredients (www.youtube.com/c/MagicIngredients) as a more reliable guide.

Let's enjoy the homemade food together!

A screenshot of the YouTube channel page for '小高姐的 Magic Ingredients'. The page features a navigation bar with links for '首页', '视频', '播放列表', '社区', '频道', and '简介'. Below the navigation bar is a banner image of a dish with green vegetables and orange sauce. The channel name '小高姐的 Magic Ingredients' is prominently displayed, along with a circular profile picture of a woman. The page indicates that the channel is '已订阅' (subscribed) and has '244 万位订阅者 · 296 个视频'. A description in Chinese reads: '客居他乡的你，是否跟我一样怀念家乡的味道呢？凉皮，擀面皮，牛羊肉泡馍，油泼扯面，酸汤水饺，甑糕，秦镇米皮，...' followed by a right-pointing arrow. At the bottom, there is a section for '上传的视频'.