



8 STEPS TO Supper Swap Success

1 Start with who you know. Ask a friend, neighbor or coworker to try supper swapping for a month. After the trial period, see how the group is working.

2 Plan 3-month menus. Put together a meal schedule in advance and prepare a menu calendar with a copy for each family to post.

3 Go with family favorites. Begin by making tried-and-true dishes your own clan enjoys. Slowly work in new recipes.

4 Adapt delivery times. Each group member can deliver at a time that works best for her. Same-evening deliveries should have food cooked and ready to eat. Advance deliveries can be uncooked with baking instructions attached.

5 Avoid pan-demonium. Use durable baking dishes and rotate them through the group. Don't expect to get the same containers back every time.

6 Honesty tastes best. Be up-front about your family's food likes, dislikes and allergies.

7 Be flexible. If you can't cook on your designated date, try trading with another group member. If it's too late, you can always have pizzas delivered!

8 Accept change. Supper swap groups will likely have members come and go. Ask participants to give a month's notice before they leave.

Co-op Cooking

Trish Berg of Dalton, Ohio tells CW she swaps meals with friends to save time and money, with delicious side benefits.

CW: What is supper swapping?

Trish: It's women helping women—sharing the cooking for their families by preparing food in bulk and swapping meals. You can join with two to four other friends and each choose a day to cook supper for the entire group. Keep one meal for your family and deliver the rest.

CW: How did you get involved in a swap group?

Trish: Five years ago, a friend asked me if I'd like to try swapping suppers to simplify our lives. I knew I needed help since my family was bored with grilled cheese, and I was tired of the 4:30-and-nothing's-in-the-oven panic.

Our group includes a stay-at-home mom, one who works full-time and two

with part-time careers. I'm a farm wife, mom, writer and professor at a local university. Between Herefords and homework, I'm busy!

CW: Does supper swapping work for people other than young moms?

Trish: Definitely! Empty-nesters, single parents, retirees and coworkers can form cooking groups. Some choose to swap on a daily basis, while others prepare frozen meals and exchange weekly or monthly.

CW: What ground rules do cooks who swap need to establish?

Trish: First, determine what a "meal" is. Our group swaps a main dish and either a side dish or dessert.

What's for dinner is a group decision for Trish Berg and friends. **1.** Members of her supper-swapping group include Trish (far left), Nann Warren, Kelly Manley and Nancy Basinger. **2.** When it's Trish's turn to cook, daughter Hannah helps package meals for delivery to the group. **3.** On weeknights, Trish, husband Mike, their children and drop-in friends enjoy the tasty collaboration.

Four times a year, we meet to plan meals for 3 months ahead. We note birthdays and anniversaries on our calendars, so we can add a celebration treat to the menu.

CW: How does exchanging meals with others save money?

Trish: Swapping can save thousands in a family's annual food costs. You shop with a plan, buy in bulk, purchase fewer frozen or fast foods and eat out less. A typical supper swap meal costs 83¢ to \$2.50 a person.

CW: Do you need to be a great cook to be in a meal exchange?

Trish: We're looking for simplicity, not gourmet dishes! Our meals are hearty, healthy and family friendly.

In our group, Kelly is our resident Mexican chef; Nancy's stuffed shells are incredible; Nann makes stromboli that's to die for; and my Saucy Meatballs (recipe above right) go over big.

CW: Besides simplifying meal-time, what benefits does supper swapping offer?

Trish: Shortly after I started swapping, my youngest child was hospitalized, taking me away from home for a week. When we got back, there was a fridge full of meals from my swap group waiting.

When you feed a family, you deliver love, caring and compassion along with the food.

CW: How can family members play an active part in the swap group?

Trish: My husband, Mike, often delivers meals for me—and our 12-year-old, Hannah, loves to help prepare our weekly meal. Daughters Sydney, 10, and Riley, 5, and our 8-year-old son, Colin, are mostly eager eaters.

A couple of times a year, our group's families get together for a huge cookout with all 18 of us.

CW: Explain how a supper swap group can expand and help the community.

Trish: While cooking in bulk for your group, it's easy to prepare an extra meal and deliver it to a shut-in, new mom or family in need. Supper swapping helps you go beyond your own front porch and reach out to others in a personal way.

Bonding over food and friendship...what could be better?

Editor's Note: You can order Trish Berg's book, *The Great American Supper Swap*, and find out more about cooperative cooking at her Web site. Connect to it through ours by clicking "Links."

From
Trish's Kitchen



Saucy Meatballs

"Mini meatballs in a sweet, tangy sauce are real family pleasers. They're a hit as an appetizer or for supper. Try them served over noodles."

- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 cup dry bread crumbs
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 2 pounds ground beef
- 1 bottle (14 ounces) ketchup
- 1 jar (12 ounces) grape jelly
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped

1. In a large bowl, combine the eggs, bread crumbs, salt and pepper. Crumble beef over mixture and mix well. Shape into 1-in. balls.

2. Place on a greased rack in a shallow baking pan. Bake, uncovered, at 350° for 20 minutes or until no longer pink. Drain on paper towels. Transfer to a greased 13-in. x 9-in. x 2-in. baking dish.

3. In a large saucepan, combine the ketchup, jelly and onion. Cook and stir over medium heat for 3-5 minutes or until jelly is melted. Pour over meatballs. Bake, uncovered, 20 minutes longer or until sauce is bubbly.

Yield: 12 servings.



Food for thought on family-friendly co-op meal making fills Trish's book.