

Za'atar spice blend adds zip to pork chops

BY LINDA GASSENHEIMER
Tribune News Service (TNS)

The seasoning za'atar gives these pork chops a delicious Middle Eastern flair. Za'atar is a spice blend popular throughout Eastern Mediterranean countries and usually includes dried oregano, thyme, sumac and sesame seeds. Conveniently, it is widely available in the spice section of most supermarkets. You may also find za'atar blended with olive oil, which works just as well in this recipe.

As an easy accompaniment, fresh zucchini cubes are mixed with rice and cooked in the microwave, creating a quick, light side dish.



TNS PHOTO BY LINDA GASSENHEIMER

Za'atar Pork Chops with Zucchini Rice

Yields 2 servings. Recipe is by Linda Gassenheimer.

2 tablespoons za'atar seasoning	4 cups (1/4-inch) zucchini cubes
2 tablespoons olive oil	1 package microwaveable basmati rice to make 1 1/2 cups cooked
4 teaspoons lemon juice	Salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 teaspoons minced garlic	2 tablespoons cilantro leaves
1/4 cup no-salt-added chicken broth	
3/4 pound boneless loin pork chop	

1. Mix za'atar, olive oil, lemon juice, garlic and chicken broth together in a small bowl.

2. Place pork on a cutting board. Remove visible fat from pork and pound until about 1/4- to 1/2-inch thick. This can be done with the palm of your hand or the bottom of a sturdy skillet.

3. Heat a nonstick skillet just large enough to hold the pork in one layer over medium-high heat. Add the pork and brown 3 minutes. Turn pork over and add the zaatar sauce to the skillet and cook 3 minutes. A meat thermometer should read 145 F. If za'atar sauce runs dry, add a little more broth.

4. Meanwhile, place the zucchini in a microwave-safe bowl and microwave 2 minutes. Remove from microwave and add the basmati rice to the microwave oven for 1 minute or according to package instructions. Measure 1 1/2 cups and reserve any remaining rice for another meal. Add the rice to the zucchini and mix well. Add salt and pepper to taste.

5. Divide the rice between 2 dinner plates. Place the pork over the rice. Spoon the sauce over the pork and rice. Sprinkle cilantro on top.

NUTRITION INFO PER SERVING: 554 calories (33 percent from fat), 20.6 g fat (3.6 g saturated, 8.6 g monounsaturated), 96 mg cholesterol, 47.3 g protein, 46.7 g carbohydrates, 3.5 g fiber, 349 mg sodium.

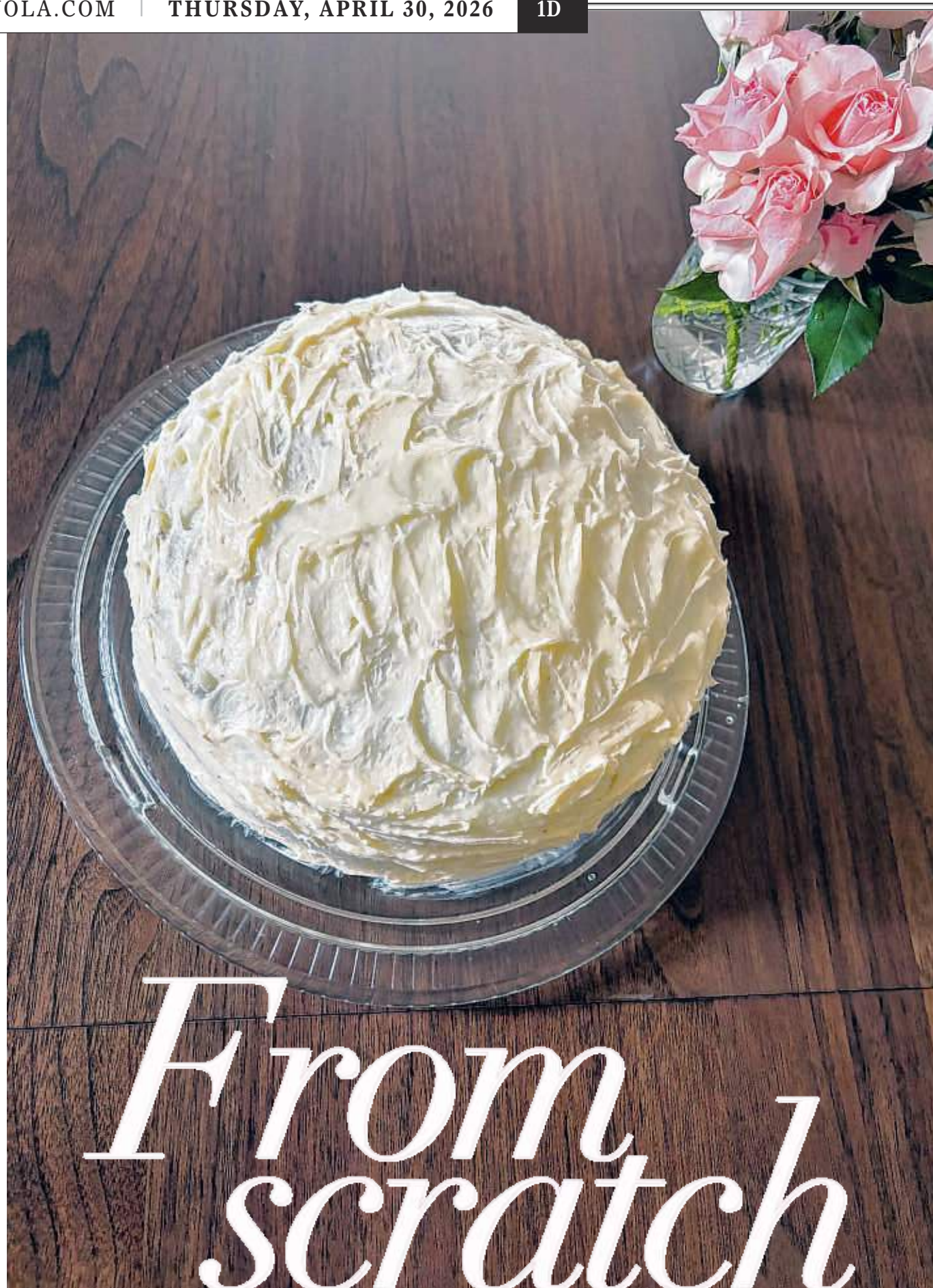
Skillet-toasted quesadillas hold sweet secret

BY LINDA GASSENHEIMER
Tribune News Service (TNS)

These quesadillas hide a delightful surprise inside that pairs well with the creamy, melted cheese. Thinly sliced apples and a swirl of fig jam add a gentle crunch and a touch of natural sweetness, creating a delicious contrast to the rich filling.

Cut into golden triangles and served with cool, creamy guacamole, they make a simple yet satisfying vegetarian meal that comes

► See QUESADILLAS, page 2D



From scratch

Don't fret. Ditch the mix and make a better cake.

BY KERRI WESTENBERG | Contributing writer

For \$2, you can buy boxed cake mixes to turn out a sheet or layer cake. But please don't. Instead, for less money, you can create a made-from-scratch wonder using ingredients already in your kitchen and without much extra effort.

Boxed cake mixes are made for convenience and long stays at the grocery store, not necessarily flavor. That is why the finished products taste overly sweet — sugar helps extend shelf life. It also explains the artificial flavors that hint at its origins.

Inside that box, besides the expected flour and other key ingredients, are extras not found in homemade versions: xanthan gum, corn syrup, modified cornstarch, food coloring, artificial flavors and other food additives. Nothing is sweet about that.

► See SCRATCH, page 2D

Recipe

Blueberry
Upside-Down
Cake 2D

Chocolate Cake with Cream Cheese Frosting

Serves 10-12. Cake recipe is adapted from "Pillsbury Kitchens' Cookbook." Frosting recipe is adapted from "The Silver Palate Cookbook."

FOR THE CAKE:
1 1/2 cups flour
1 1/4 cups sugar
1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa
1 1/4 teaspoons baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup milk
3/4 cup oil
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 eggs
FOR THE FROSTING:
8 ounces cream cheese, room temperature
6 tablespoons unsalted butter, room temperature
3 cups confectioners' sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1. Heat oven to 350 F. Grease the bottom of two 8-inch cake pans with the butter and dust with flour.
2. Using a stand mixer or a hand mixer, blend all ingredients at low speed until combined. Then beat for 3 minutes at medium speed.
3. Pour batter into prepared pans and bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean.
4. Cool for 5 minutes and remove from pans to cool completely.
5. Using the same mixer with a clean



PHOTOS BY KERRI WESTENBERG
Chocolate Cake with Cream Cheese Frosting

bowl, cream the cream cheese and butter together.
6. Sift the confectioners' sugar through a fine strainer to remove lumps and add to the cream cheese mixture along with the vanilla. Beat until the sugar and vanilla are fully incorporated.
7. Place one 8-inch round on a cake plate and spread with frosting. Place the second round on top.
8. Spread a thin layer of frosting around the side of the cake and then spoon the remaining frosting on top and swirl.

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, April 30, the 120th day of 2026. There are 245 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On April 30, 1975, the Vietnam War ended as the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon fell to Communist forces.

Also on this date:

In 1789, George Washington took the oath of office at Federal Hall in New York as the first president of the United States.

In 1803, the United States completed its purchase of the 828,000-square-mile Louisiana Territory from France for 60 million francs, the equivalent of about \$15 million at the time; the acquisition roughly doubled the size of the United States.

In 1900, engineer John Luther "Casey" Jones of the Illinois Central Railroad died in a train wreck near Vaughan, Mississippi, staying at the controls to slow his passenger train before it struck a stalled train near an approaching station; Jones was the only fatality of the accident.

In 1945, as Soviet troops

approached his Berlin bunker, Adolf Hitler took his own life, as did Eva Braun, whom Hitler married the previous day.

In 1973, as the Watergate scandal deepened, President Richard Nixon announced the resignations of top aides H.R. Halde- man and John Ehrlichman, Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst and White House counsel John Dean (though Dean was actually fired by Nixon).

In 1993, top-ranked women's tennis player Monica Seles was stabbed in the back during a match in Hamburg, Germany, by a man who described himself as a fan of second-ranked German player Steffi Graf. (The man was convicted of causing grievous bodily injury, and was only given a two-year suspended sentence.)

In 1993, the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) announced that the World Wide Web, which was invented at CERN four years earlier by Tim Berners-Lee, was free for anyone to use, and re- leased its source code to the public domain.

In 2013, millions of Dutch

people dressed in orange flocked to celebrations for a once-in-a-generation mile- stone for the Netherlands' ruling House of Orange- Nassau: after a 33-year reign, Queen Beatrix abdi- cated in favor of her eldest son, Willem-Alexander, who became king.

In 2019, Japan's 85-year- old Emperor Akihito abdi- cated his throne, ending his three-decade reign; his son Crown Prince Naruhito ascended to the Chrysan- themum Throne. (Japan's last abdication was when Emperor Kokaku abdicated in 1817.)

Today's birthdays: U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres is 77. Filmmaker Jane Campion is 72. Film- maker Lars von Trier is 70. Basketball Hall of Famer Isiah Thomas is 65. Actor Johnny Galecki is 51. Actor Sam Heughan is 46. Actor Kunal Nayyar is 45. Rapper Lloyd Banks is 44. Actor Kirsten Dunst is 44. Basket- ball Hall of Famer Seimone Augustus is 42. Actor Gal Gadot is 41. Actor Dianna Agron is 40. Actor Ana de Armas is 38. Rapper- producer Travis Scott is 35. Rapper Lil Tjay is 25. Actor Emily Carey is 23.

The underappreciated, often-in-the-way cart

Dear Miss Manners: Where should I park my shopping cart while browsing a grocery section and/or reading ingredient labels?

I park my cart in the middle of the aisle, thereby allowing other shoppers to view the same items. This also lets me step out of the way to allow passersby through. I feel that other shoppers feel hurried when I wait for them to finish in a section, as we cannot both be there with our carts at the same time. I know that I feel hurried being in that same position.

My husband maintains that leaving my cart in the middle of the aisle is rude, and that I should stay with it.

Gentle reader: Shopping carts do not have an easy life: vegetables to deli to canned goods to checkout and back again all day — it's dizzying. There is no truly safe place to park them: A space that may be clear in the moment is crowded with shoppers the next.

It's all very well to say the cart can rest in the parking lot roundup, but it seems unlikely, knowing that any minute, a departing shopper may hurl a

fellow cart at you, missile-like. While Miss Manners does not therefore ban separating from your cart, she does feel that any part- ing should be brief.

Wherever you leave it, you will need to be close enough to be aware of other customers to ensure that the cart has not become a roadblock.

Besides, you do not want it to get lonely.

Dear Miss Manners: Despite the best of intentions, there is a lot of acrimony between my ex-husband and me, and since our children are all legal adults, I have no contact with him. Contact between my ex and our children is also limited due to a lack of effort and engagement (their choice).

When my oldest child and his fiancée hosted a party to celebrate their engagement, my ex was there when I arrived with my partner. Who should have initiated introduc- tions? In hindsight, I guess the groom-to-be (our son) should have introduced his father to my partner. My partner had no issue with introducing himself, but did not feel it was his place.



Judith Martin

MISS MANNERS

There will be other events coming up. I already feel like navigating this wedding (and the time leading up to it) will be a minefield, so please help to clarify.

Gentle reader: Primary duty for making introductions does lie with the hosts, although in this case, that meant either your son or his fiancée. This is why most hosts do not stray far from the door as the party starts and the guests descend in a clump.

One or two inevitably get missed, in which case in- troductions would be taken over by anyone who knows all the parties — presumably you or your ex.

Miss Manners is unclear why that did not happen, but she applauds your partner for stepping up. She is sure you agree that the coming events will go more easily if everyone jumps in when needed, rather than hanging back to see who fails to act when called upon.

Send questions to Miss Manners at her website, www.missmanners.com; to her email, dearmissmanners@gmail.com; or through postal mail to Miss Manners, Universal Uclick, 1130 Walnut St., Kansas City, MO 64106.

Blueberry Upside-Down Cake

Serves 6-10. Recipe adapted from "Baking: From My Home to Yours" by Dorie Greenspan.

- 1 3/4 sticks unsalted butter
- 14 tablespoons sugar (a little less than 1 cup)
- 2 cups blueberries, fresh or frozen
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 cup flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F.
2. Melt 6 tablespoons of butter in a small saucepan. Add 6 tablespoons of sugar and stir until the mixture comes to a boil. Carefully pour this mixture into an 8-inch cake pan.
3. Scatter the berries in an even layer atop the butter mixture.
4. Use a stand or hand mixer to beat the remaining stick of butter on medium until smooth.
5. Add the remaining 1/2 cup sugar (8 tablespoons) and continue to beat until light and creamy, about 3 minutes.
6. Add eggs one at a time, then add the vanilla and milk.
7. Stir in the remaining dry ingredients and mix on low speed just until incorpo- rated.



PROVIDED PHOTO BY KERRI WESTENBERG

Blueberry Upside-Down Cake

8. Spoon the batter over the blueberries and smooth the top.
9. Bake for 40 to 45 minutes, until the cake is golden and a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean.
10. Run a knife between the cake and the pan and immediately, and carefully, turn the warm cake onto a platter. If berries stick to the pan, simply scrape them off and return them to the cake.

SCRATCH

Continued from page 1D

Cakes made with a mix are so notoriously unre- markable that many recip- es guide users to doctor them for a better end prod- uct. What is the point, I've always wondered, since bakers could instead apply the same effort to bake a

cake truly from scratch?

For my go-to chocolate cake, for instance, I just toss all the ingredients into a mixing bowl and beat. I measure a few more compo- nents than I might if I used a mix, but the bit of extra work pays off with better taste and texture, purer ingredients and the joy of creating a delicious dessert from a few handy staples. My chocolate cake is the

basis for a range of frost- ings, but my favorite is a straightforward cream cheese version. The second cake, a blueberry upside- down cake, requires no frosting. Flavorful, dark purple berries top this stun- ner.

These two recipes are easy and easier. Also, great and greater. Make them yourself and you can decide which is which.

QUESADILLAS

Continued from page 1D

together in minutes.

HELPFUL HINTS:

- Any type of 8-inch to 9-inch tortilla can be used.
- Look for guacamole in the produce or refrigerated section of the market.
- Ant type of jam such as strawberry can be used.
- To make four tortillas using one skillet, make one at a time and cover with foil to keep warm.

Skillet-Toasted Cheese Quesadillas

Yields 2 servings. Recipe is by Linda Gassenheimer.

- Olive oil spray
- 4 (8-inch to 9-inch) lite flour tortillas
- 3/4 cup reduced fat shredded sharp cheddar cheese, divided use
- 2 tablespoons fig spread or jam, divided use
- 1 very thinly sliced apple, divided use
- 1 cup bought guacamole



TNS PHOTO BY LINDA GASSENHEIMER

Skillet-Toasted Cheese Quesadillas

1. Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat and spray with olive oil spray. Add one tortilla and sprinkle 2 table- spoons cheese on top. Add 1/4 of the apple slices and 1/2 tablespoon fig jam to one half of the tortilla. Cook until cheese starts to melt.
2. Fold tortilla in half and remove to a plate. Cover with foil to keep warm.
3. Repeat with the remain- ing 3 tortillas.
4. When all 4 are cooked,

cut them into triangles. Di- vide them in half and place them on 2 dinner plates. Add 1/2 cup bought guacamole to each plate. Dip the triangles into the guacamole and en- joy.

NUTRITION INFO PER SERVING: 564 calories (50 percent from fat), 31.1 g fat (9.5 g saturated), 3.5 g monounsaturated), 30 mg cholesterol, 22.4 g protein, 67.9 g carbo- hydrates, 21.7 g fiber, 1241 mg sodium.

Reviving stale snack chips

Dear Heloise: Stale chips used to end up in the trash at my house far too often. Now I bring them back to life with a quick oven trick that really works:

Spread the chips in a single layer on a baking sheet so that they heat evenly. Slide the pan into an oven set to 300 F for about 5 minutes. The gentle heat re- moves extra mois- ture and restores the crisp texture. Keep a close eye on them since chips can go from perfect to overdone pretty fast.

After tossing out one too many half-eaten bags, I started using this method regularly. Let the chips cool for a minute or two before serving. This short rest helps them crisp up even more. The flavor comes back nicely, and the crunch is surprisingly close to fresh. It's a simple habit that cuts down on waste and saves money. And honestly, it feels nice not to throw away perfect- ly good snacks. — Daniel P., in Tulsa, Oklahoma

Stop sliding cutting boards

Dear Heloise: Chopping up vegetables can turn into a slippery mess when a cut- ting board won't stay put. I finally found a simple fix that keeps everything

steady from start to finish. Before you start prepping, place a damp paper towel or a thin dishcloth under the cutting board. The slight moisture creates

just enough friction to hold the board firmly in place on the countertop.

I discovered this trick after nearly sending sliced to- matoes to the floor one busy evening.

This close call was enough for me! Now I use this method every time I cook, especially when I'm working with tougher ingredients that require more pressure. It makes chopping feel much safer and far more comfortable. Check the towel during longer prepping sessions and re-dampen it if it starts to dry out. A secure cutting surface not only prevents accidents but also helps you work faster and with better control. It's such a small step, but it makes a big difference in the kitchen. — Linda S., in Albany, New York

Refresh the microwave

Dear Heloise: Food splat- ters inside the microwave can leave behind lingering odors. A quick steam- cleaning trick clears it up fast: Fill a microwave-safe bowl with water and add a

few slices of lemon. Heat it up for about 3 minutes until it steams. Let it sit for another minute before opening the door. The steam loosens stuck-on food, and the lemon helps neutralize smells. Finally, wipe down the interior with a cloth, and every- thing comes off easily!

After dealing with one too many mystery odors, this became my go-to solution. It's simple and natural, and it leaves the microwave smelling clean. — Rachel T., in Boise, Idaho

Remove pet hair fast

Dear Heloise: Pet hair seems to cling to every surface, especially couches and chairs, but a slightly damp rubber glove works wonders for cleanup! Just run your hand over the fabric, and the hair gath- ers into easy-to-remove clumps. I tried lint rollers and brushes, but nothing worked as quickly as this.

After one shedding sea- son, my sofa was nearly covered. I kept a pair of gloves nearby just for this task. Rinse the glove as needed and keep going. It only takes a few minutes and saves me a lot of frus- tration. — James D., in Scranton, Pennsylvania

Send a hint to heloise@heloise.com.

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