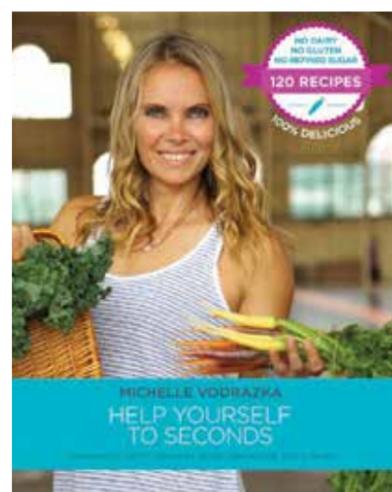


SELF-MADE

Michelle Vodrazka



Michelle Vodrazka is a nutritionist, personal trainer, cookbook author and mother of five from Ottawa, Ontario, whose passion is inspiring others to transform their lives through healthy eating and cooking.

Although she has published three cookbooks, Michelle didn't learn to cook—or even enjoy being in the kitchen—until her late 30s. Her journey into healthy cooking and eating was inspired by her youngest daughter, whose drastic change in diet helped her recover from a serious medical condition when she was a toddler. Michelle now loves spending time dreaming up new creations in her kitchen and sharing with others her journey into healthy eating.

RECIPES

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Super Simple
Pumpkin Chicken

Taco Turkey
Lettuce Wraps

Carrot Orange
Ginger Soup

Pizza Zucchini Boats



Super Simple
Pumpkin
Chicken
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I GREW UP in a European household where a lot of emphasis was placed on traditional family values like preparing and cooking food. Even though both my parents worked full time, all meals were prepared from scratch and enjoyed as a family at the dining room table. My mother was an excellent cook and would regularly spend hours in the kitchen on weekends preparing our meals.

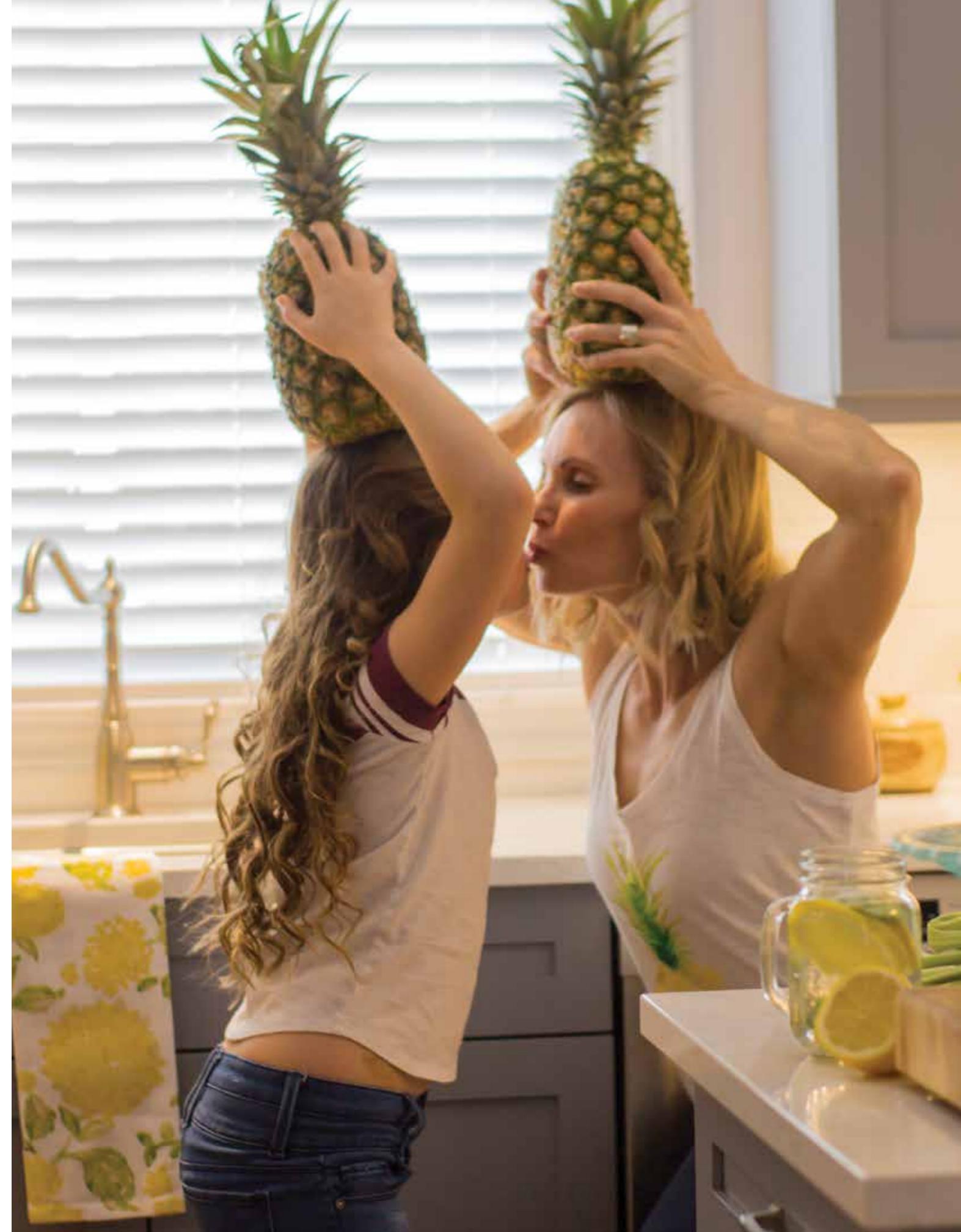
I was never sent to school with the traditional bologna sandwich and granola bar. Instead, much to the amusement of my peers, I showed up in the cafeteria with thermoses of soup, spaghetti and meatballs or warm leftovers from the night before. I remember feeling embarrassed and wishing my lunches could be more “normal” like those of my peers.

Although I didn’t recognize it then, the experience set me up for a lifetime appreciation of what real food should look like. But like most kids, I grew up and started to assert my independence and rebel against tradition. I remember telling my mother that cooking was boring and I couldn’t understand why she wasted so many hours in the kitchen.

Eventually, I moved out to attend university in the United States. I was always incredibly active, but in my newfound independence, I overindulged in carbonated beverages, packaged, “fat-free” foods and like many university students, more than my share of alcoholic beverages. I put on “the freshman 15.” Though I joined a gym and started to jog regularly, I was still somehow feeling sick and exhausted, not to mention failing to build the body I wanted. My motivation to improve myself—and help others do the same—eventually led to a job in the gym as a personal trainer.

After a few years of training clients, I realized that while they were getting stronger and more fit, they were making only minimal strides in terms of their body composition. I realized you can’t out-exercise a poor diet. I wanted my clients to have the results they wanted, so I spent hours researching everything I could on nutrition and healthy eating. Mind you, that was in the 1990s, when we were told fat was the enemy, carbs were our best friends and calorie counting was paramount.

Following these recommendations resulted in weight loss but blood sugar fluctuations, too, plus low energy levels and cravings for sugar and carbs. My clients often lost hard-earned muscle mass in the process. I was confused and frustrated but continued to exist off fat-free products that



MY GOAL IS TO SHOW IT'S POSSIBLE TO MAKE HEALTHY LIVING FUN AND JOYFUL, WITHOUT FEELING LIKE YOU HAVE TO MAKE GREAT SACRIFICES TO GET THERE.

had minimal nutritional value and were filled with sugar.

It wasn't until my late 30s, when my youngest daughter got sick, that I started to understand the value of real food and the incredible power it had to heal your body—and your life. Just after my daughter Noelle turned 1, I noticed there was something really wrong. She lost her newly developed words, stopped interacting with her siblings, didn't want to be touched and withdrew behind a fog so thick that no one could reach her.

Faced with a bleak future and minimal results from the current available treatments, I started to

search for alternative approaches. My research led me back to the healing power of food. With the guidance of an amazing doctor, we changed the way we cooked and ate. I took courses online to learn how to cook and prepare real food from scratch.

Miraculously, bit by bit, the fog that had enveloped my daughter lifted, and I witnessed first-hand the integral role that diet and nutrition could play in health and recovery. For several years, we followed a gluten-, dairy- and sugar-free diet that was nutrient-dense and provided her body (and ours) with the ingredients needed for optimal health.

Since the dramatic improvements to Noelle's well-being, we've incorporated a more sustainable, balanced approach to nutrition that relates to real life. Our meals include a more relaxed, balanced, real-world approach, while remaining true to our wholesome food philosophy, which strives for 95 percent of our meals to be made from scratch, using natural ingredients. Our attention to the quality of our food and the way it is prepared remains a priority. We also insist on leaving room for experimentation and occasional indulgences. Life is too short not to!

If there is one thing I learned from this journey, it is to listen to your intuition and never, ever give up. Too often, we get caught up in letting others dictate what is possible and limit ourselves in what can be accomplished. I used to wish for the confidence to question things more, do my own research and trust myself to do what was right. As a result, I made myself a promise to

Taco Turkey Lettuce Wraps SERVES 4

PREP TIME 10 minutes
COOKING TIME 20 minutes

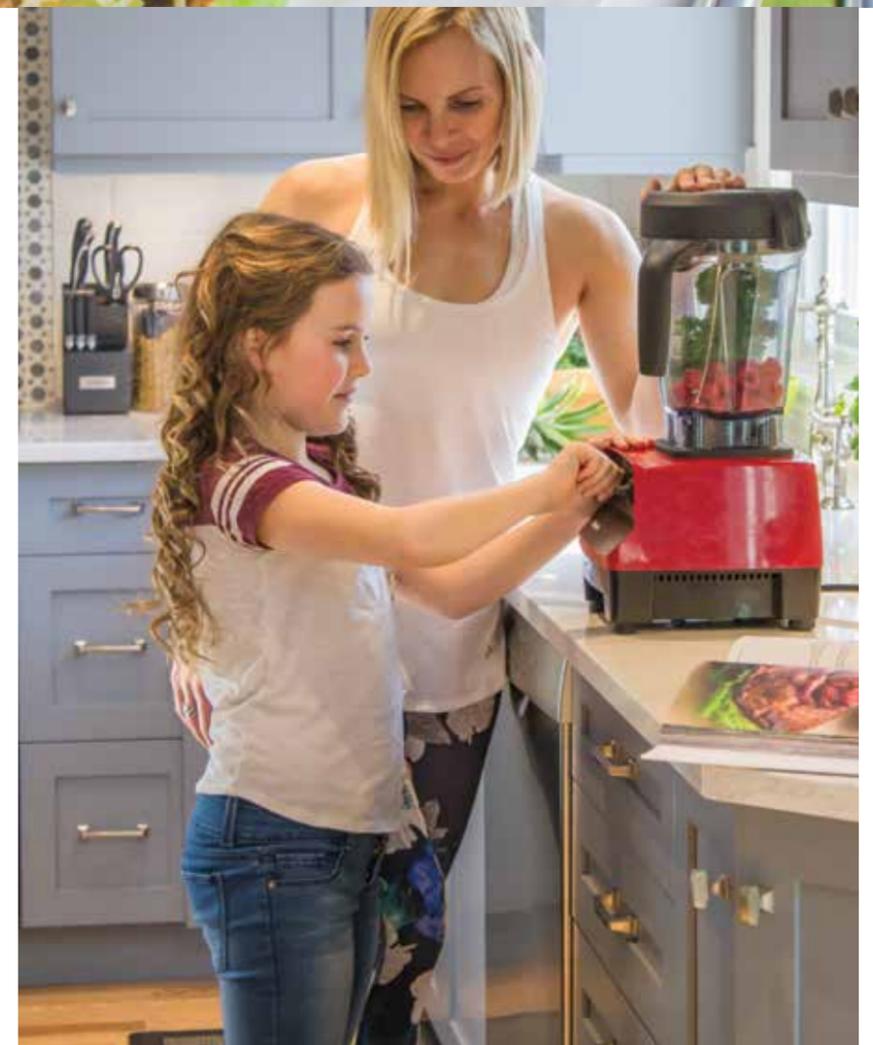
- 1 Tbsp avocado oil
- 454 grams ground turkey, extra lean (about one package)
- ½ sweet onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ cup marinara pasta sauce
- ¼ cup chicken broth
- 1 Tbsp chili powder
- 1 tsp cumin
- ½ tsp oregano
- ½ tsp sea salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- ½ cup black beans, rinsed and drained
- ½ cup frozen yellow corn kernels, thawed
- 4 large Romaine lettuce leaves
- ¼ cup chopped red onion
- ½ cup shredded cheddar cheese or vegan Daiya cheese
- ½ cup chopped red bell pepper
- 1 ripe avocado, cubed

1. Heat avocado oil in a pan over medium-high heat. Add ground turkey and brown.
2. Add sweet onion and cook for a few more minutes. Add garlic and cook one more minute.
3. Add in marinara sauce and chicken broth, and stir to combine.
4. Add in chili powder, cumin, oregano, sea salt and pepper and cook until broth is absorbed.
5. Stir in the black beans and corn kernels and cook another minute to heat through.
6. Divide among the four Romaine leaves, top with red onion, cheese, red pepper and avocado and serve immediately.



IN OUR HOME

we love Taco Tuesday, except usually we make them on Saturdays, because we're rebels like that. I mean really, who doesn't love tacos on any day of the week? In an attempt to make tacos more nutritious and diet-friendly, they are served in lettuce boats and made with ground turkey instead. They are an easy, quick, kid-friendly weeknight meal that takes less than 30 minutes to make and will have everyone asking for seconds!



keep an open mind and continue learning and pushing myself beyond my comfort zone.

This commitment motivated me to share my passion and discoveries of nutrition and food with others by writing a food blog, MichelleVodrazka.com, which was recently named one of the top 60 food blogs in Canada. My blog has grown to include hundreds of simple, nutritious, gluten-free, family-friendly recipes. My blog also is what led me to publish two cookbooks, “Smart Snacking for Sports” and “Help Yourself to Seconds,” with the hope of inspiring families to step into their kitchens and explore the wonder, joy and numerous health benefits of creating healthy meals together.

While keeping my story and approach to nutrition real, I want to continue changing the way people look at food. I want to continue challenging the status quo. I hope sharing both what I have learned and the mistakes I have made will inspire families to embark on their own health journeys by stepping into their kitchens, educating themselves about the wonderful benefits of whole foods and discovering the joy and pleasure of cooking and eating together.

Carrot Orange Ginger Soup

SERVES 4-6

PREP TIME 5-10 minutes

COOK TIME 25 minutes

2 Tbsp coconut oil

1 medium yellow onion, chopped

7-8 large carrots, chopped

1 Tbsp peeled and grated

fresh ginger

1 clove garlic, finely chopped

6 cups chicken stock

1 can (16 oz) organic chickpeas

2 Tbsp coconut oil, melted

¼ tsp sea salt

1 tsp curry power

Splash of sesame oil

1 cup freshly squeezed orange juice

1 Tbsp honey

1 Tbsp curry power

½ tsp cinnamon

1 tsp sea salt

¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper

TOPPINGS – optional

Red pepper flakes, to taste

¼ cup chopped fresh parsley

1. Preheat oven to 350F.

2. Melt coconut oil over medium heat. Add onions and saute until translucent.

3. Add carrots, ginger, garlic and chicken stock. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and let simmer for about 20-25 minutes or until carrots are tender.

4. In the meantime, drain and rinse chickpeas and pat dry. Place chickpeas in a medium sized bowl and drizzle with melted coconut oil, sea salt and curry powder and mix until well coated.

5. Place chickpeas on a baking sheet, spread them out evenly and bake for 15-20 min. Remove from oven when done and set aside.

6. When soup has finished cooking for the above noted time, add in sesame oil, orange juice, honey, curry powder, cinnamon, salt and pepper and remove from heat.

7. Use an immersion blender to puree soup until smooth.

8. Top with roasted chickpeas, red pepper flakes and fresh parsley and serve immediately.

THIS CARROT ORANGE GINGER SOUP

will warm you up and comfort you from the inside out! The sweetness of the carrot, the warmth of the ginger, and the freshness of orange will rank this soup high on your list of recipes to repeat.



Carrot Orange Ginger Soup

Super Simple Pumpkin Chicken

SERVES 4-6

PREP TIME 5-10 minutes

COOKING TIME 25 minutes

- 1 Tbsp avocado or coconut oil
- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves, cut into bite-sized pieces
- Sea salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
- 2 Tbsp coconut oil
- 2 cups sliced mushrooms
- 1 onion, chopped
- ½ (16 oz) can pumpkin puree
- ½ cup coconut cream, scooped off the top of a can of chilled, full-fat coconut milk
- ⅓ tsp ground nutmeg
- ½ cup chicken broth
- 1 tsp arrowroot powder

1. Heat a frying pan over medium-high heat. Add oil to coat the pan. Add chicken and cook until evenly browned and no signs of pink are showing. Season with salt and pepper. Remove from heat and set aside.
2. In a large pot, saute mushrooms and onions, in coconut oil for about five minutes or until the onions are translucent.
3. Add browned chicken, pumpkin puree, coconut cream, nutmeg, and chicken broth. While bringing to a boil, ladle a ¼ cup of the pumpkin coconut sauce into a small bowl. Stir in the arrowroot powder until it dissolves, then add the mixture back into the pot.
4. Let the sauce simmer for about ten minutes, or until the chicken is cooked through, watching the pot carefully so it doesn't burn. Remove from heat and serve warm.



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WHO DOESN'T LOVE PIZZA?

In my house, everyone! And what better way to get the kids to eat zucchini than to make it taste like pizza? Seriously, this recipe is so tasty and easy that you will want to add it to your weekly rotation. Full of protein, fibre, healthy carbs and heart-healthy, this meal will keep you satisfied for hours.



Pizza Zucchini Boats

SERVES 6

PREP TIME 15 minutes

COOKING TIME 25 minutes

- 6 large zucchini squash
- 150 grams ground beef (about one package)
- ½ cup chopped onion
- Sea salt and freshly-ground pepper, to taste
- ¾ cup pasta sauce
- ½ cup black beans, rinsed and drained
- ½ cup frozen corn kernels, thawed
- ½ tsp basil
- ½ tsp oregano
- 1 cup grated cheddar cheese

1. Preheat oven to 375F.
2. Cut zucchinis in half lengthwise and use a spoon to scoop out the insides so that about ½ inch shell remains. Place the scooped out zucchini into a large bowl.
3. Place the zucchinis face side down onto a cutting board to drain.
4. In a large saucepan cook beef until only slightly pink inside, then add the onion and cook until no pink is visible. Season with salt and pepper.
5. Place beef mixture in the bowl with scooped out zucchini, and add the pasta sauce, black beans, corn, basil, oregano, salt and pepper. Mix together until well blended.
6. Turn the zucchini boats right side up and place them on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Place the filling inside the zucchini boats and top with the cheese.
7. Bake for 25 minutes, then broil for 2 more minutes to lightly brown the cheese.