

FOOD PLANNING

The rising cost of food is probably the biggest challenges families face today. It is something that we NEED and if we don't plan and choose alternatives to save on money, this budget can get over blown each month.

When we were first married and starting out, I had the convenience food mentality. I didn't know how to really cook, we never planned our meals out, and we shopped whenever it looked like we were out of food. I look back and think how much we spent each week on average for groceries and eating out and it costs almost the same that we spend now with 11 people on a lean week 😊 (Lean meaning, I had to cut out the "extras" but we still ate good wholesome foods this week.)

How did I combat this:

- I learned how to plan out weekly, then bi monthly, then monthly menus
- I learned how to cook, good wholesome foods from scratch
- We stopped eating out and learned to eat in

I am very thankful for my Amish friend, who taught me the fine art skills of homemaking. I did take home economics in school, but that just covered the basics. This woman, taught me how to make homemade bread, how to preserve foods, and showed me other ways to slash my food budget. She taught me how to make delicious tasting foods that my family would actually eat.

I started out with a basic cookbook from her. This had tons of recipes with basic ingredients that you should have on hand in your pantry. I would browse through the book, and write down recipes that I wanted to try each week. If they were ones that we enjoyed, I put a smiley face next to them in the book. If there was something we didn't like, I wrote that down too.

I learned how to build a pantry from her too. She would preserve jars and jars of food, filling her basement shelves with rows and rows of beautifully colored foods. It was very inspiring. Here I was a Mom, my main job and I wanted to be the best that I could be. When I was in college and pursuing a career in finance,

I was constantly looking for ways to improve my knowledge so that I could be successful in my career. Why would I not want to do this in my home life? I wanted to be a wife, that saved her husband money. One that her husband could come home from work after a long day and enjoy a nicely prepared meal from me. I had big dreams and started working on them.

Were all my attempts successful? I wish I could say yes, but they were not. Many of times, I had forgotten to add salt to a recipe, burned the dinner, or just added the wrong ingredient and ruined the dish. It took many, many years of trial and error. What I did learn was to skip all the big fancy dishes, and stick to basics. My husband enjoyed a basic meal of spaghetti or tacos verses the roasted spring vegetable medley over couscous. that I would have found in a magazine. Myself, I loved the roasted spring vegetable medley over couscous, but I was learning to cook for my family, not for me. I have learned how easy it is to make a large salad, soup, or other dish that only I would enjoy and store it for the week for my meals. But my first focus is my families.

Weekly menu planning

Every successful thing starts out with a plan. If you plan ahead for things, most of the time you won't end up stuck in the end. To begin for successful meal planning, I started out with a piece of paper. I wrote the days of the week and left some space in between. I then wrote down 7 meals that I could make for our family. I asked my husband what he preferred to eat. His response was spaghetti and tacos. Easy, two days gone. I then remembered a soup recipe that we ate at my Amish friends home and really enjoyed, so I added that along with some homemade bread that I learned to make☺ Sandwiches were easy on Friday nights, so I planned for some poor boy subs, another recipe from our Amish friends. I already had four days done, and only had to think of three more.

The weekend was coming, it was nice weather wise, and we had a grill, let's do chicken. My mom used to marinate it in Italian dressing and that made it delicious, I could do that. I found an easy rice recipe to go with it, from my basic cookbook. This was getting easier.

I looked through the casserole section and found a beef stroganoff recipe. Hmm, I remember eating Hamburger Helpers as a child and that was good. I thought I could make it myself and added it to my menu.

Hmmm, if I make that grilled chicken, maybe we could make a little more extra and I could do something with it. We liked eating at the Mexican restaurant, and my husband enjoyed chicken fajitas---that would work. Seems easy enough, I found a basic recipe along with a Mexican rice in the cookbook.

Wow, seven recipes, this was going to be easy☺

Then it was breakfast for me and the little children to think about. Think simple. I could do scrambled eggs and toast for a couple of days. Breakfast burritos— with some of those leftover tortillas from taco day. We like yogurt, but know the packaged stuff is loaded with sugar. I opt to buy a big container of plain or vanilla yogurt and make smoothies instead. A bag of frozen berries and a little bit of honey will sweeten it up. My husband liked bigger breakfasts when he was home on the weekend, so I planned for pancakes and omelets. I could save

some of the ham lunchmeat from the Poor Boy Subs and some peppers and onions from the fajitas.

Lunches were planned out with leftovers from the night before. I added some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the children for a few days. I could get a package of tortillas and use refried beans with cheese and make Mexican grill cheese for the children. They really enjoyed that at our friends home and it would be easy and cheap. I could even make my own refried beans, something I wanted to start doing. Well, this time I will buy canned, but I am going to purchase some dried pinto beans to build my pantry, so next time I will have them made and won't need to buy the canned version.

I planned a couple of desserts and snacks for us for the week. Cookies were always fun to make. I could make a big batch and have enough for desert every night.

Salads are important and we will get a big bag and have it for the week. Some carrots, celery, and whatever seasonal fruit is on sale will be good for quick snacks.

If you don't mind repeating meals, consider making a big pot of chili or a pasta dish that you can have for a couple of nights.

Now I had a plan. I knew what I would make each day of the week and what I was going to feed the children for the day. Now it was time to build my grocery list.

I started out by looking at my first days meal.

- breakfast-eggs and toast
- lunch-peanut butter and jelly
- dinner—spaghetti

I wrote down on my shopping list the foods I would need for each of those meals. I then continued with all of the other planned meals. I added the snack items, the fruits and vegetables, and any other item we need weekly like eggs, milk, bread, and butter. I was thinking about making those homemade refried beans to begin stocking my freezer. I wrote down to get a bag of dried pinto

beans for that purpose. I looked through my cupboards and refrigerator for anything else I might need and added that to my list. I looked at my list that I had on my refrigerator of items that I had run out of and thrown away already and decided if I needed to replace them or not.

Planning a monthly menu

The above method works for making a weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly menu. The concept is the same for all of these, it just takes the initial time to sit down and make them. Once you have one made for any amount of time, you will never have to “think” about what to make for dinner again. You can always go in and change a couple of different meals if you wanted to change things up a bit.

Tips for making a monthly menu:

- Favorite meals are repeated weekly.
- Dinner themes are designated for specific days. Choose from the following themes or make up your own:
 - soups and sandwiches
 - casseroles
 - Crockpot meals
 - heartier and time consuming meals like Salisbury steak, roasted chicken dinner, lasagna, etc
 - Italian
 - quick fix meals
 - chicken dish
 - Mexican
 - meatless dish
 - leftover night
 - pizza night
 - taco bar

Don't be afraid to repeat family favorite meals. It is okay for every Tuesday to be "Taco Tuesday" or every Wednesday to be "Spaghetti Wednesday." It takes the guess work out of what you are going to have. Your family will come to expect what you are having those days and look forward to them, especially if they like them.

I once had a master menu plan idea as well. This was a sheet that listed all of our families favorite meals. This worked great for when my brain was preoccupied taking care of many little ones. When it came time to create a menu, I couldn't even think about meals. To solve this, I referenced my menu plan ideas and took meals from it. This I made one day while I was mindlessly nursing a baby. I wrote down all the different meals that I could think of that we had enjoyed over the years. It helped when I was "forced" to make a menu plan out for the week.

Do what works best for your family. If a monthly menu overwhelms you, stick to a weekly menu. The following week double the weekly menu and change a couple of meals. Viola! You have a bi-monthly menu. After you get used to a few different weekly and bi-weekly menus, it will be easier to convert them to monthly menus.

The key is to keep working at it. Don't give up, stay determined to set up a monthly menu for your family. Work towards it every week. Take your "office day" and work a little bit each week until you can successfully have a month's worth of meals planned out.

You can use the following monthly menu as a guide to make your own or download copies free at www.plainandnotsplain.com

Monthly Menu Plan

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Lunch Ideas		Food Prep Reminders
Breakfast Ideas		
Baking or Dessert	Extra Quick Fix Meals	

I have a spot for quick fix meals. These are for meals when life seems to take a turn upside down and I can't get dinner done. We all have emergencies in our lives, and the quick fix section are for those rare occurrences when I am not able to get dinner on the table.

- fettuccine and alfredo sauce---noodles and jarred sauce
- baked potatoes with canned chili and toppings
- homemade pizzas on pita or tortillas—use jarred sauce and toppings
- chicken nuggets and tater tots---I buy these each month and use them only when we need to
- canned tomato soup and grill cheese

Food Prep reminders section are for things like:

- Cook dried beans and freeze
- Make chocolate granola for breakfast foods

- Make a big batch of spaghetti sauce and freeze into individual portions
- Make chicken/vegetable broth and freeze
- Make homemade cabbage vegetable soup and freeze for easy lunch portions
- My chicken prep instructions for 20 lbs of chicken breast
 - Marinate 4 breasts in Italian dressing for grilling –freeze
 - Cut 3 breasts into chunks and marinate for stir fry
 - Cook 1-10lb package in crock pot and shred and freeze in 1 lb containers for future meals. Example: tostadas, chicken salad, chicken soup, chicken burritos, chicken casserole.
- My ground beef prep instructions for the 25 lbs of ground chuck I am going to purchase.
 - 2- meals worth of homemade meatballs (4lb total)
 - 2-meals worth of hamburger patties (6lb total)
 - 1-meal of Salisbury steak patties (3 lb total)
 - 1- meatloaf prepared and frozen (5 lb total)
 - 7-1 lb packages of cooked ground beef for meals

This helps when I arrive home from shopping and wonder, “What am I to do with all of this meat?” I could look back at my menu and figure it out or I could take a couple of minutes and write it down so that when my mind is “busy,” I won’t have to think.

Making a grocery list is the same concept as doing so for a weekly menu, but it is just longer. How I went about to organize this was to make a master grocery shopping list. I know lists, lists, list for everything 😊 Remember, this was not done all at one time in my life. I have learned to implement different ideas and routines into our lives and all of them took time. I didn’t do all of these routines and lists that we do now, in my first year of marriage, it was a process. When I started realizing things were not working in areas of my life, that is when I started changing them. When I would grow tired of making a grocery list every single month before I shopped, I finally took extra time and planned out a master grocery list on my computer and now all I have to do is print it off each month and write whether I need an item or not.

Planning a master grocery list

Before you begin this, you have to know your grocery aisles. I mentally walked down the aisles in the order that I would in the store. I start in the back and work my way up. I wrote down items that I normally would purchase in the order they appeared in the stores.

I placed a line before the foods to mark how many of each item I need. This list consists of the items in my pantry on a normal basis. It also includes what we normally fill our freezers and refrigerators with. Some months, if I was adding a new meal to our menu, I might need another item not on the list and then I would just write it down near the foods that it would be grouped with.

I wrote out a space for spices so that I could write down which ones I was out of. We get the large containers at Sams Club and use those. They are the most cost effective for our family and are a good quality. If you have an Amish bulk food store in your area, purchase your spices through them. They are much cheaper than a typically grocery store. Did you know that when looking for certain spices, most stores place them in alphabetical order? This will help you in locating them quickly.

The first time I made my master grocery list, I forgot a few items and had some in the wrong order when I went to the store. I made notes and then fixed them when I got home. It took some tweaking, but now we have a list that we can print off each month. This saves a lot of time. One quick look in the pantry, a quick run through my monthly menu, and a quick look in the refrigerators and freezers and then I am done.

I place my fruit and vegetables needs in a separate part because I don't know where I will be getting them from. I might stop at a local farmers market that week or I might find a sale at a store. It is separated so that I don't forget it.

I also have my paper/household needs list. This includes all of the items that we keep stocked in the home. I have learned to buy a couple extras here and there when on sale so that this inventory doesn't get low. We rarely run out of these types of things. Each month, I look and see how many we have stored and if there is only a couple tubes of toothpaste that will get us through the month, I

will usually buy a couple of extras if I can or if I see them on sale. Even if I don't necessarily "need" them. This help keeps our inventory full.

I left space in the bottom right hand corner for any other things that I might have to do that day. I may need to run to the library, bank, and post office. I make sure to write it down so that it doesn't get forgotten.

Here is a sample master grocery list.

<p>ALDIS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ chips ___ pretzels ___ salsa ___ saline crackers ___ syrup ___ fruit snacks church ___ crackers church ___ dried strawberries ___ dried apples ___ dried coconut ___ dried pineapple ___ almonds ___ peanut butter ___ bacon ___ italian dressing ___ ranch ___ ketchup ___ mustard ___ mayo ___ corn flakes ___ powdered coffee creamer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ cooking spray ___ baking soda ___ baking powder ___ brown sugar ___ powdered sugar ___ choc chips ___ tomato juice ___ lemon juice ___ soda for Dad ___ green beans ___ peas ___ beets ___ garbanzo ___ pinto ___ chili beans ___ baked beans ___ tortillas ___ garbanzo ___ pinto ___ dried black beans ___ cr mush ___ cr chick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ ramen ___ spaghetti ___ bowtie pasta ___ penne pasta ___ curly noodles ___ parmesan cheese ___ jar sauce pizza ___ turkey pepperoni ___ instant mash pot ___ parboil rice ___ sloppy joe ___ hamb buns ___ hotdog buns ___ bread ___ frozen straw ___ frozen blueberries ___ sausage links 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ milk ___ eggs ___ sour cream ___ cream cheese ___ butter ___ hotdog ___ kielbasa ___ turkey bacon ___ break sausage ___ ham ___ chicken breast ___ salami ___ cheese slice 	<p>VEGES and FRUIT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ carrots ___ potatoes ___ onions ___ green onions ___ peppers ___ fruit 	<p>FRESH MARKET</p> <p>___ lbs ground chuck</p> <p>Extra meat:</p>	
<p>WALMART</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ coffee creamer ___ coconut milk ___ nonfat plain yogurt ___ spray butter ___ popcorn seasoning ___ cheerios ___ wheat cereal ___ taco seasoning ___ salsa ___ beef bouillon ___ chicken bouillon ___ Alfredo sauce ___ radiator noodles ___ shell macaroni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ soy sauce ___ sesame oil ___ sweet chili sauce ___ straw jam ___ coffee ___ chicken nuggets ___ brussel sprouts ___ mixed veges ___ later tots ___ food whip ___ ice cream ___ thai coconut ___ banana chips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ sub buns ___ pita bread ___ kale ___ minced garlic 	<p>SAMS CLUB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Doritos ___ apple juice ___ chicken breast ___ feta cheese ___ romaine lettuce ___ grape tomatoes ___ celery ___ mozz shred ___ cheddar shred ___ american slices ___ nacho cheese ___ pecans ___ olive oil 	<p>SPICES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ trash bags ___ dial gold bar soap 	<p>PAPER SHOPPING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ medicine ___ bandaids ___ hand cleaner ___ toothpaste ___ kids toothpaste ___ flossers ___ deodorant ___ girls shampoo ___ men 3 in 1 wash ___ hairspray ___ astringent ___ suave lotion ___ cotton pads ___ qtips ___ CAT FOOD ___ bleach ___ laundry soap ___ dish soap ___ oven cleaner ___ sponges ___ comet ___ bleach spray ___ windex ___ murphys oil ___ wood duster ___ paper towels ___ toilet paper ___ kleenex ___ paper plates ___ napkins ___ quart bags ___ gallon bags 	<p>TRACTOR SUPPLY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ chicken layer pellets

Building your pantry

What if you don't have a pantry built up? You can slowly start building one. If you cut back just a bit on groceries each week---maybe you choose a less expensive dinner or cut out some extra snack type foods, you should be able to keep aside some extra money. I made my list of the items that I wanted to have stocked, if I saw some on sale while I went shopping, I would grab a couple. Each month I added to my pantry. When I would make my new grocery list each month, even if I had the items in my pantry before I went shopping and needed them for meals, I still planned on buying them so that I wouldn't take from my pantry inventory. Over the course of six months time, I was able to build my pantry with many different staples. This allowed me flexibility each month in planning meals. I never ran out of meals to make. If I had unexpected guests, we were able to still enjoy a good meal together. If the children wanted to make cookies and I didn't plan on making them, I could because I had all the ingredients stored in my pantry.

Plus it is a good insurance to always have food stored. You never know if you won't be able to get to the store due to car troubles or the weather. Maybe your husband 's job will be slow and you won't be able to get groceries that week. By having a well stocked pantry, you won't have to "suffer" in that area of your life. When you are going through tough times financially, it is a constant reminder when you don't have enough food to eat or are eating something you don't even like because you couldn't afford food that week. Keep it stocked so that when your husband is down, you can still prepare a delicious, basic meal to keep the harmony good.

Always rotate your stock. When you bring home a new bag of flour, place it behind the old bag so that the old one gets used up first. If you have a lot of items, use a permanent marker with dates you purchased on them.

What sort of items should you keep stocked? That will vary from each person and your dietary needs. Here is a basic list which will allow you a good start to stocking up. I would take this and then look at the foods that you purchase normally and start buying a couple of extra to add to your inventory.

Items you need:

- baking powder
- baking soda
- bouillon cubes
- canned beans black, kidney, pinto, garbanzo
- canned tomatoes—diced (you can always puree them if needed)
- canned soups to add to casseroles
- chocolate chips
- cocoa
- coffee
- flour
- honey
- nuts
- olive oil
- pasta
- peanut butter
- rice
- rolled oats
- soy sauce
- spices
- sugar brown and white
- tea
- tomato paste
- vanilla extract
- vinegar

These are some basics to have in your refrigerator. You can keep extras that are not perishable in your pantry:

- butter
- cheeses
- eggs
- jam
- ketchup
- lettuce
- mayo
- mustard

- orange juice
- plain yogurt
- sour cream

Fresh vegetables and fruit:

- apples
- bananas
- cabbage
- carrots
- cucumbers
- celery—if this gets wilted before you eat it, cut off the end and place in a bowl of cold water. It will crisp back up.
- garlic—you can buy jarred and store in the refrigerator
- onions
- oranges
- potatoes
- sweet potatoes

Foods to stock in your freezer:

- bread
- chicken breast
- fish fillets
- frozen mixed vegetables
- hamburger in 1 or ½ pd packets
- steak or beef roast

When you start building your pantry and notice that you have a lot of convenience boxed or canned foods. Things like Hamburger Helpers, canned-ready to eat soups, desert mixes, and packaged cookies, consider learning how to make these homemade. This next step will save you a lot of money. We purchased many things that were packaged and once I started making my own, I realized that they were cheaper, they tasted better, plus I was making a much healthier version of that food. You have to pay someone to package all of that stuff up individual, why pay when you can do it yourself? If you look at the list of ingredients on the back, you are also paying for a lot of preservatives which are not good to add to you or your families health.

Other things to stop buying packaged and consider making yourself:

- microwave popcorn--use bulk seeds and pop in an air popper, in a large heavy stock pot with a little oil, or a brown paper bag and use the microwave. Use spray butter and some popcorn seasonings to flavor.
- Bread crumbs--save leftover bread in the freezer in a large bag --keep the leftover biscuit, the ends of the bread loaf, a stale leftover dinner roll and when the bag is full, process in the food processor . You can add parmesan cheese, basil, and oregano for Italian bread crumbs.
- Homemade pudding---It takes a little longer but the taste just doesn't compare. Place a piece of plastic wrap or wax paper on the top while cooling to prevent the film from forming.
- Croutons---make your own by buttering pieces of bread, adding spices, and then baking in the oven. You can use butter or brush on oil. Garlic, parmesan, oregano, or basil are all good spices to add. To add a "fun" touch, cut out little shapes with cookie cutters, store the scraps in your bread crumb bag for later.
- Pancake and waffles--you can make a large batch and freeze these in between sheets of waxed paper. This will be great for easy morning breakfast. You can pop them in the toaster for a quick heat. Add more liquid to your pancake batter and make thinner "crepes." Freeze these the same way, heat, and serve with canned fruit and some powdered sugar. Applesauce or jam are a family favorite topping in our home. You can also add cocoa powder to your batters to make chocolate waffles or pancakes.
- Chicken or beef stock---make your own. Save the bones in your freezer in a bag and when you have a large amount, simmer with vegetables and spices to make your own homemade stock.
- Frozen bread dough---fresh bread is one of the best smells ever! Learn to make this and freeze balls of it. You can take out the amount you want to bake each week without having to make it all from scratch each time. You love wheat, husband loves white? Make two smaller balls and place them next to each other in the loaf

pan. They will cook together and you will have a “half wheat, half white” bread to eat from.

- Gravy—skip the packets and make your own. When your roast or chicken is done, strain the liquid from the meat into a small saucepan. Stir a couple of tablespoons of flour and ¼ cup of cool water until mixed. Heat up the drippings until boiling and whisk in the flour mixture. Season with salt and pepper, instant gravy.
- Salad dressings---with a few simple ingredients, you can make your own based on your preferences.
- Cookies, brownies, and cakes---find a basic recipe and make it from scratch. Tastes just as good, maybe even better.
- Salad kits---find out what ingredients are used in what you normally would buy and make your own. It is cheaper and better for you to make. Asian chopped salad is my favorite. I realized for the same price of one bag, I can make a week’s worth of salads by making my own.
- Flavored rice and noodle packets---again look at the ingredients and search for a recipe with similar flavors.
- Hummus---homemade hummus tastes wonderful and is so easy to make.
- Barbeque sauce—easy and economical to make this with a base of ketchup and brown sugar.
- Popsicles and frozen treats---you can make a healthier version of these by doing it yourself.
- Granola and energy bars—we freeze ours and save for the month.
- Homemade granola---an easy and versatile recipe that you can make with your own favorite ingredients.
- Pizza crust—we have a delicious tasting recipe that is full proof and easy to make.

Repurposing common leftovers

We all have them. They are the plastic containers that usually get forgotten in the back of the refrigerator. The mashed potatoes you look at and wonder why you made so much! The roasted chicken that looked so great when you first made it, but now you wonder why you spent so much on it. The large can of diced tomatoes that was such a great deal, but now you don't know what to do with all the leftovers. We shouldn't just throw away and waste our food. There are many ethical reasons why not to do that. Here are some things that you can do to save money by repurposing some foods.

CHICKEN

After roasting a chicken, peel off the skin and discard. Do this while still warm, it will make easier to remove. Scrape the pieces off the bone and place in individual plastic freezer bags. Here are some ways to repurpose the chicken :

- Chicken salad---mix with some mayo for a basic sandwich. Spice it up by adding chopped celery, onions, mandarin oranges, halved grapes, sliced almonds and dried cranberries.
- Mexican grilled cheese---mix shredded chicken and cheese, and place in between two tortillas. Fry in a skillet and serve with salsa and sour cream.
- Chicken pot pie---inside a premade refrigerator pie crust add: 2 cups shredded chicken, 2 cans cream of chicken soup, and 1 can mixed vegetables. Bake 350 for an hour.
- Chicken crepes---make thin pancakes or use some frozen leftovers and add a chicken gravy mixture as your filling. Use shredded chicken and cream of chicken soup.
- Chicken shepherd's pie---in a 9x13 pan layer shredded chicken, frozen mixed vegetables, cream of chicken soup and top with leftover whipped mashed potatoes or make some instant potatoes for the top. Bake 350 for 30 minutes.
- Chicken noodle soup---make your own chicken broth, shredded chicken, mixed vegetables, and noodles.

- Chicken burritos---place in Crockpot: shredded chicken, can of corn, cup of salsa, and a can of black beans, drained. Heat and serve on tortillas topped with cheese, lettuce, and sour cream.

CHILI

Serve your chili the first day with some homemade cornbread. Over the next couple of days, mix it up and serve in any of the following ways:

- Baked potatoes with chili and cheese.
- Chili haystacks---layer on individual plates: rice, chili, cheese, chopped lettuce, salsa, and sour cream.
- Chili and pasta---serve over spaghetti noodles with shredded cheddar and crushed saltines crackers.

BEEF ROAST

Always cook these in the Crockpot for the longest time possible. This makes the roast fall apart no matter how tough the meat may be. You can make the following:

- Beef stew---use leftover potato and carrots from your roast and make a thicker gravy for an easy stew night.
- Serve thickened gravy and beef pieces over mashed potatoes, rice, or noodles.
- Beef and bean burrito---mix shredded beef, refried beans, salsa onions and roll up in a tortilla.
- Philly steak sandwiches---sauté onion, green peppers, and add some shredded beef. Place on slider buns, or any other kind of bun. Top with provolone cheese and broil until melted.

PASTA

The best way to reheat this is by briefly immersing in boiling water. Toss with olive oil or butter, garlic, and parmesan cheese.

BREAD

- Freeze for bread crumbs

- Make croutons
- Make baked French toast

HAM

Ham is very versatile to use in many different kinds of leftovers. Try any of the following:

- Ham quiche—chop up a variety of vegetable and dice up some ham. Pour egg mixture over all and bake.
- Ham skillet—a family favorite after every ham dinner
- Omelet—dice up some for omelets
- Sandwich spread—place in a food processor to grind up and mix with mayo, onion, and pickle relish. You can also add some chicken that has been ground up in the food processor. This makes a delicious spread.

SCRAMBLED EGGS

Make these one morning and put leftovers rolled up in tortillas. You can add some real bacon bits and shredded cheese. Microwave or place on a cookie sheet to heat up.

MASHED POTATOES

- Twice baked potatoes—add sour cream, ranch powder, shredded cheddar cheese, and bacon bits. Whip and bake 15 minutes in a casserole dish.
- Shepherd's pie---make a chicken or ground beef shepherd pie for dinner. Layer: meat, gravy, vegetables, and mashed potatoes.
- Potato pancakes—mix with egg and spices to form patties and fry in skillet.
- Add to potato soup to thicken it
- Freeze in 1 cup portions---for soup thickener

RICE

Make fried rice by sautéing in sesame seed oil--- rice, veges, and scrambled eggs. Serve with soy sauce.

PANCAKES

- If you have extras, freeze between individual sheets of waxed paper and heat in a toaster for a quick breakfast.
- Spread peanut butter on for a quick snack. Add banana slices too.
- Make the batter thinner and make crepes. Place jam in between, roll up and top with powdered sugar.

POTATO PEELS

Normally these will go in the trash. Next time, wash and scrub potatoes and save the peels. Try and keep them in larger peel pieces. Drizzle with oil and add spices. Bake 40 minutes in a 400 degree oven until crisp.

EXTRA FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

Maybe while at the store this week, you got a really good deal on fresh grapes or the Farmers Market seller offered you a large bushel of zucchini or green beans. What shall you do with all of it? Freeze it.

- Fruit such as grapes or any kind of berries- rinse in water and place on cookie sheets to freeze. Once frozen, place in plastic freezer bags. These make great quick snacks or for an addition to smoothies
- Bananas—you can freeze bananas with the peel on. If you want to use them, take out of the freezer and let thaw a few minutes. Peel as you would an apple for easy removal of peel. You can also chop up and place in snack size bags. These are good for smoothie additions as well. Smashed bananas are great for making banana muffins or breads.
- Zucchini—is great shredded. This is good for chocolate zucchini bread, zucchini cake or add it to soups or lasagna for extra nutrition.

- Green beans and cabbage need to be blanched first in boiling water and then frozen.

MILK

Did you know that you can freeze gallons of milk? If it is getting close to the expiration date and you are not going to be able to use it up, freeze it. When you are ready to use, place in the refrigerator and let thaw. Use up quicker than you normally would for a gallon of milk. I plan some “milk dishes” to use it up faster. We might make macaroni and cheese, homemade pudding, or potato soup.

TOMATO PRODUCTS

Ever open a can of tomato paste, need only 2 Tablespoons of it and now you have a whole can to throw away? Freeze on a cookie sheet in 2 tablespoon blobs. After frozen, place in plastic freezer bag for easy use.

Any other canned tomato product can be frozen for later use. If you don't like diced or whole tomatoes, you can puree them . You can use in any dish calling for tomatoes:

- soups
- spaghetti sauce
- casseroles
- eggs

TURKEY

- Slice and make sandwiches
- Add chopped up turkey, can of cream of mushroom soup, a little milk and serve over noodles
- Taste like Thanksgiving casserole---layer in 9x13 pan a can of crescent rolls rolled out—bake 15 minutes. Top with chopped turkey, stuffing, vegetables, can of cream of chicken soup, top with mashed potatoes(whip again to make fluffy) and shredded cheese. Bake 350 for 30 minutes.

GROUND BEEF

- Mix with macaroni and cheese—add some leftover spaghetti sauce for a Hamburger Helpers style dish.
- Taco salad---salad, canned chili beans, crushed chips, meat, and dressing
- Haystacks—layer rice, meat, beans, cheese, chopped lettuce, salsa, and sour cream/ranch
- Chili---add canned beans, diced tomatoes, and tomato sauce

SPAGHETTI SAUCE

- Homemade pizza---we always use spaghetti sauce for our individual pizzas
- Pizza burgers—mix with ground beef, and top with mozzarella cheese
- Soup—you can add to your tomato based soups

LEFTOVER COOKED VEGETABLES

- Pizza—put on tortilla or pita bread and top with cheese—bake until crisp
- Soups—add to soups for added nutrition
- Stir fry—cook rice and vegetables and top with soy sauce and sesame seed oil
- No crust quiche---chop up vegetables and add to egg and milk mixture and bake in oven

Miscellaneous tips for the kitchen that have helped me:

- Squash--to make a smooth puree use an electric mixer and whip it. The blades will pick up any fibrous stings during the process making it easier to remove
- Chocolate curls—make your own by using a vegetable peeler.

- Make own soda alternative...fruit juice and club soda or lemonade and seltzer.
- Bacon—save time and mess by baking on a cookie sheet lined with foil in the oven.
- Sausage—cook in muffin tins to avoid greasy mess.
- Coffee--stays fresh for only about an hour after brew add a pinch of salt to your cup to get rid of the stale taste. you won't taste the salt.
- Potato masher---works well to mix up meatloaf, quickly crumbles ground beef, scrambles eggs, crumble up feta cheese, chop eggs for egg salad, and mixes up guacamole.
- Cleaning water bottles, jars, or baby bottles-- sprinkle a little bit of dried rice or dry beans, soapy water and shake. It will clean the insides better than a bottle brush can do.
- Ring pans---make one by placing a tin can filled with dried beans in the center of a round cake pan.
- Heart cake by making one square and one circle cake and placing together.
- Make a round loaf of bread by placing on a cookie sheet, cut a crisscross into the top and bake.
- Store spices out of direct sunlight and heat. The sunlight will lessen the flavors.
- Place rolls together in clusters and bake.
- Freezing casseroles---place in the casserole dish you will be cooking and place in freezer—pop out and put in bag.
- Hang charts inside of cupboards of cookie equivalents, measurements, substitutions, favorite recipes, etc.
- Baking potatoes—stab with a fork to allow steam to escape.
- Baking potatoes—don't wrap in foil wipe in oil.
- Keeping cookies soft—place half an apple or slice of white bread in container.

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