


The Homemaker's Table: A Full Day of Meals Made Simple

by *Amy Maryon*

Table of Contents

1. Breakfast	2
2. Lunch	29
3. Snacks	53
4. Dinner	81
5. Breads	113
6. Desserts	119

 A Note from Amy

Dear Momma,

I wrote this cookbook for you—the one standing at the stove with a baby on her hip, the one packing lunches between loads of laundry, and the one trying to figure out what’s for dinner with what’s left in the pantry.

I know what it’s like to feel stretched thin and wonder if anyone sees the little things you do each day. But I want to remind you: this work matters. The meals you prepare, no matter how simple, fill more than bellies—they help build the memories your children will carry with them for a lifetime.

So let this book be a companion in your kitchen. Let it give you ideas on the busy days and inspiration on the slow ones. And while you’re stirring a pot or baking something sweet, take a moment to breathe, to enjoy your time at home, and to smile at those beautiful children gathered around your table.

*You’re doing holy work—quiet, unseen, and full of love. And I’m cheering you on every step of the way.
With love from my kitchen to yours,*

Amy Maryon

Chapter 1: A Morning in My Kitchen

There's a certain rhythm to the mornings when you've got a house full of kids—some already up and chattering, some still curled under blankets, and a few just waking with tousled hair and sleepy eyes. The kitchen is where it all begins. Before the noise of the day settles in, there's the soft clatter of bowls, the hum of the coffee maker, the scent of something warm rising in the oven.

For years, I've made breakfasts with babies on my hip and toddlers tugging at my apron. Some mornings were slow and sweet, others a blur of cereal and scrambled eggs. But over time, I found my favorite rhythms—meals that made the mornings smoother, bellies fuller, and the house feel just a little more peaceful. These recipes aren't fancy, but they've been well-loved. They're the kind you make with what you have in the pantry. The kind you can double, freeze, and pull out on the wild days. And the kind that become memory-makers without even trying. So whether you're cooking for one or for ten, I hope this chapter feels like a friend in the kitchen with you—reminding you that even in the chaos, breakfast can be a moment of peace, comfort, and joy.



My Breakfast Staples List

What I like to always keep on hand so breakfast can happen—even on the wild mornings.

In the Refrigerator:

- Eggs – For scrambling, baking, or casseroles
- Milk (or milk alternative) – For cereal, oatmeal, pancakes, and smoothies
- Cheese (block or shredded) – For omelets, breakfast burritos, and grits
- Butter – A must for toast, muffins, and just about everything
- Yogurt – Great for smoothies, parfaits, or just a spoonful with granola
- Leftover cooked potatoes or veggies – Perfect for hash or egg bakes
- Cooked sausage or bacon – Quick protein addition
- Sour cream – Makes eggs fluffier, adds richness to casseroles
- Fruit – Apples, bananas, or berries (fresh or frozen work!)

In the Pantry:

- Oats (old-fashioned or quick) – Oatmeal, granola, baked oat cups
- Flour – For bagels, muffins, pancakes
- Sugar (white and brown) – Just enough to sweeten what needs it
- Baking powder & baking soda – For muffins, pancakes, and biscuits
- Cinnamon & vanilla extract – Add warmth and sweetness to almost anything
- Maple flavoring or syrup – For homemade syrup or topping
- Peanut butter – A quick breakfast spread or smoothie addition
- Grape-Nuts or cold cereal – Easy snack or warm breakfast
- Crackers or biscuits – For little ones or a light start
- Granola – Sprinkle on yogurt, muffins, or eat by the handful

In the Freezer:

- Frozen bananas or berries – Great for smoothies or muffins
- Breakfast burritos, sandwich melts, muffins, waffles – Homemade and ready-to-go
- Shredded cheese and cooked sausage – Prepped ahead for easy casseroles
- Frozen bagels or toast – Just warm and serve

Hearty Favorites & Casseroles

Sometimes breakfast needs to do more than just fill your belly—it needs to carry you through a full day. These are the tried-and-true, family-sized favorites I make when the table is full and the morning is long. They're easy, filling, and have warmed up many a busy day in our home.

Hashbrown Breakfast Casserole

A one-dish wonder that's always a hit. It's simple, hearty, and works for breakfast, brunch, or even dinner on a busy night.

Ingredients:

- 1 (30 oz) bag frozen shredded hashbrowns, thawed
- 1 lb ground sausage, browned
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 8 large eggs
- 1 cup milk
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- Optional: chopped onion, bell peppers, or spinach

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F and grease a 9x13" baking dish.
 2. Spread hashbrowns in the bottom of the pan.
 3. Sprinkle sausage, veggies (if using), and cheese on top.
 4. In a bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, salt, and pepper. Pour evenly over casserole.
 5. Bake uncovered for 45–50 minutes, until set in the middle and golden.
 6. Let rest 5 minutes before slicing.
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Egg Casserole with Sour Cream

The sour cream makes this one soft, almost fluffy. It's perfect for feeding a group—always dependable and easy to customize.

Ingredients:

- 10 eggs
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup shredded cheese (cheddar or Colby Jack)
- 1 cup cooked, crumbled sausage or diced ham
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional: finely chopped onions or peppers

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease an 8x11 or 9x13 baking dish.
 2. In a large bowl, whisk eggs, sour cream, salt, and pepper.
 3. Stir in meat, cheese, and veggies.
 4. Pour into dish and bake for 35–45 minutes, or until the center is set.
 5. Let cool a few minutes before serving.
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🌙 Overnight Breakfast Casserole

This one's my go-to for holidays and houseguests. I mix it up the night before, tuck it in the fridge, and wake up to an oven-ready breakfast.

Ingredients:

- 6 slices bread, cubed
- 1 ½ cups shredded cheese
- 1 lb sausage or ham, cooked
- 8 eggs
- 2 cups milk
- ½ tsp dry mustard or onion powder
- Salt & pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Grease a 9x13" dish. Layer bread cubes, meat, and cheese.
 2. In a bowl, whisk eggs, milk, mustard, salt, and pepper. Pour over bread.
 3. Cover and refrigerate overnight.
 4. In the morning, bake at 350°F for 45–50 minutes, until golden and puffed.
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🥪 Baked Brunch Sandwiches (Ham, Tomato & Mustard)

These feel a little fancy but take no time at all. The mustard gives a bit of tang, and the melty cheese makes it comforting and warm.

Ingredients:

- 8 small sandwich rolls
- 1/2 lb sliced ham
- 8 slices cheese (Swiss or cheddar work great)
- 1–2 tomatoes, sliced
- 2–3 Tbsp Dijon or regular mustard
- Optional: sprinkle of dried herbs

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment.
 2. Slice rolls and spread a little mustard on each.
 3. Layer ham, tomato slices, and cheese.
 4. Wrap each sandwich in foil and bake 10–15 minutes until heated through and cheese is melted.
 5. Serve warm—perfect with fruit or eggs on the side.
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Breakfast Pizza

A fun way to change things up. This is especially loved by kids and always makes breakfast feel like a special treat.

Ingredients:

- 1 roll pizza dough or crescent roll sheet
- 6 eggs
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1/2 lb sausage or bacon, cooked
- 1–2 cups shredded cheese
- Optional: diced peppers, onions, or mushrooms

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
 2. Spread dough onto a greased baking sheet and bake for 6–8 minutes.
 3. While baking, scramble eggs with milk until just set.
 4. Top pre-baked crust with eggs, meat, veggies, and cheese.
 5. Return to oven for 8–10 more minutes until cheese is melted and crust is golden.
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Cheesy Grits Bake

Warm, rich, and comforting. This casserole takes a humble bowl of grits and turns it into something special.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups water
- 1 cup quick grits
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 cup shredded cheddar
- 2 eggs
- 1/4 cup milk or cream
- 1 Tbsp butter

Instructions:

1. Bring water and salt to a boil. Stir in grits and cook until thickened.
 2. Remove from heat and stir in butter and cheese.
 3. In a small bowl, beat eggs with milk, then slowly stir into the grits.
 4. Pour into a greased 8x8 dish.
 5. Bake at 350°F for 40–45 minutes, until lightly golden and set.
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Biscuits and Gravy Casserole

This feeds a crowd with all the flavors of a diner breakfast—only easier. I love this one for slow Saturdays.

Ingredients:

- 1 can biscuits (or homemade, cut in pieces)
- 1 lb ground sausage
- 1/4 cup flour
- 2 ½ cups milk
- Salt & pepper to taste
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder (optional)

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Cut biscuits into quarters and place in a greased 9x13.
 2. Brown sausage, then stir in flour and cook 1–2 minutes.
 3. Add milk and stir until thickened into a gravy. Season well.
 4. Pour sausage gravy over biscuits.
 5. Bake for 30–35 minutes, until bubbly and golden.
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French Bread Egg Bake

This one came from needing to use up leftover bread—and it became a family favorite. Everything gets soaked with eggs and baked into a golden, cheesy casserole.

Ingredients:

- 1 loaf French or Italian bread, cubed
- 8 eggs
- 2 cups milk
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp pepper
- 1 cup shredded cheese
- 1 cup cooked sausage or chopped ham
- Optional: spinach, tomatoes, or sautéed onions

Instructions:

1. Grease a 9x13" dish and add bread cubes.
 2. Whisk eggs, milk, salt, and pepper.
 3. Pour egg mixture over bread, then add cheese, meat, and optional veggies.
 4. Let sit 15–30 minutes (or overnight in fridge).
 5. Bake at 350°F for 45–55 minutes, until golden and set in center.
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From the Oven

There's something extra special about baking in the morning. The smell of cinnamon, the quiet bubbling of the oven, and little ones waking up to something warm and sweet—these are the recipes that turn a slow morning into a memory.

Apple Cinnamon Oatmeal Cups

These little cups are hearty, soft, and gently spiced. I keep a stash in the freezer for easy breakfasts—just warm and go!

Ingredients:

- 3 cups rolled oats
- 2 Tbsp brown sugar
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1 cup milk
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup unsweetened applesauce
- 2 tsp maple extract (or vanilla)
- 1 ¼ cups diced apples (peeled if desired)

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and grease or line a muffin tin.
 2. In a large bowl, mix oats, brown sugar, baking powder, cinnamon, and salt.
 3. In another bowl, whisk together milk, eggs, applesauce, and extract.
 4. Combine wet and dry ingredients, then fold in apples.
 5. Fill muffin cups almost to the top.
 6. Bake for 25–30 minutes, until set and golden.
 7. Let cool and store in the fridge or freezer.
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Chocolate Chip Oatmeal Cups

These feel like a treat but still keep things wholesome. Perfect for little hands or coffee time.

Ingredients:

- 3 cups oats
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1 cup milk
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup applesauce or mashed banana
- 1 tsp vanilla
- ½ cup mini chocolate chips

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease muffin tin or use liners.
 2. Stir dry ingredients in one bowl, wet in another.
 3. Combine and mix well, then stir in chocolate chips.
 4. Divide into 12 muffin cups and bake 20–25 minutes.
 5. Cool and enjoy, or freeze for later.
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Pancake Muffins

All the flavor of pancakes, none of the flipping. These bake beautifully and freeze well too.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups pancake mix
- 1 egg
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk
- 1 Tbsp maple syrup
- Optional: mini chocolate chips, blueberries, or chopped fruit

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line or grease a muffin tin.
 2. Mix pancake mix, egg, milk, and syrup until smooth.
 3. Stir in optional add-ins.
 4. Fill muffin cups $\frac{3}{4}$ full.
 5. Bake 13–16 minutes, until just golden on top.
 6. Cool and store in fridge or freezer.
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Baked French Toast Casserole

A Saturday morning favorite. It smells like cinnamon rolls and feels like a warm hug.

Ingredients:

- 1 loaf French bread, cubed
- 6 eggs
- 2 cups milk
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup heavy cream (or more milk)
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup sugar
- 1 Tbsp vanilla
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- Dash of nutmeg

Instructions:

1. Grease a 9x13" baking dish and layer bread cubes evenly.
2. In a bowl, whisk eggs, milk, cream, sugar, vanilla, and spices.
3. Pour over the bread. Cover and refrigerate overnight if desired.
4. Bake at 350°F for 45–50 minutes, until golden and set.
5. Serve with butter, syrup, or a dusting of powdered sugar.

Banana Baked Oats

This is one of those nourishing dishes that makes you feel like you're doing something good for your body and soul.

Ingredients:

- 2 ripe bananas, mashed
- 2 cups oats
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- Pinch of salt
- 1 ½ cups milk
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp vanilla
- Optional: chopped nuts, raisins, or shredded coconut

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and grease a 9x9" dish.
 2. Mix all ingredients together in a large bowl.
 3. Pour into dish and spread evenly.
 4. Bake for 35–40 minutes, until set and golden.
 5. Slice into squares and enjoy warm or chilled.
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Pumpkin Spice Baked Oatmeal

Warm, spiced, and perfect any time of year—even if you're not quite ready for fall.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups oats
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp pumpkin pie spice
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1 cup milk
- ½ cup pumpkin purée
- 1 egg
- ⅓ cup maple syrup or brown sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and grease an 8x8" baking dish.
 2. Mix dry ingredients in one bowl, wet in another.
 3. Combine and stir until smooth.
 4. Pour into dish and bake 30–35 minutes.
 5. Serve with cream, yogurt, or a drizzle of syrup.
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Maple Muffins

The soft crumb and warm maple flavor make these just right for a quiet morning with a hot drink.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ cup butter, softened
- ½ cup sugar
- ⅓ cup maple syrup
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup milk
- 1 tsp vanilla

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line or grease muffin tins.
 2. Cream butter, sugar, and maple syrup. Add eggs one at a time.
 3. Stir in flour, baking powder, and salt alternately with milk.
 4. Fill muffin cups ¾ full and bake 18–20 minutes.
 5. Let cool and enjoy with butter or jam.
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Brown Sugar Crumb Cake

This soft, tender cake with a sweet crumbly topping is the kind of thing that makes an ordinary morning feel extra special.

Ingredients:

Cake:

- 2 cups flour
- ¾ cup sugar
- 2 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ cup butter, softened
- 1 cup milk
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp vanilla

Crumb Topping:

- ½ cup brown sugar
- ⅓ cup flour
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ¼ cup butter, cold

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and grease a 9x9" pan.
 2. In one bowl, mix flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Add butter, milk, egg, and vanilla.
 3. Pour batter into pan.
 4. In a separate bowl, cut butter into the topping ingredients until crumbly.
 5. Sprinkle over batter.
 6. Bake 35–40 minutes, until golden and cooked through.
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Eggs, Bites & Skillet Dishes

Sometimes breakfast needs to be quick and satisfying. Other days, it's about using up leftovers and making something hearty out of what's on hand. This section is full of simple, nourishing favorites—many of them make-ahead or freezer-friendly—and all of them tested by real-life hungry people around my table.

Copycat Starbucks Egg Bites

These are fluffy, protein-packed, and so easy to make in batches. I like using a muffin tin or silicone molds—just add what you have on hand and bake away.

Ingredients:

- 6 eggs
- ½ cup cottage cheese
- ½ cup shredded cheese (cheddar, Swiss, or pepper jack)
- ¼ cup cooked bacon or chopped spinach
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 325°F. Grease a muffin tin or silicone mold.
2. Blend eggs and cottage cheese until smooth. Stir in cheese, meat/veggies, salt, and pepper.
3. Pour into molds about ¾ full.
4. Bake for 25–30 minutes or until set.
5. Cool slightly before removing. Great for freezing or meal prepping.

Veggie Egg Muffins

A fun way to use up small bits of veggies. These are colorful, customizable, and great for little ones too.

Ingredients:

- 6–8 eggs
- 1 cup chopped vegetables (peppers, onions, spinach, mushrooms)
- ½ cup shredded cheese
- Salt and pepper

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and grease muffin tin.
2. Whisk eggs, salt, and pepper in a large bowl.
3. Stir in cheese and chopped veggies.
4. Pour into muffin cups (¾ full) and bake 20–25 minutes until set.
5. Store in fridge or freezer for a quick breakfast.

Sausage Balls

These little bites go fast. They're savory, cheesy, and great for grab-and-go mornings or brunch platters.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- 3 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp salt
- 8 oz cheese block-shred
- 8 oz cream cheese
- 1 lb ground sausage

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. Mix all ingredients in a bowl (using hands works best).
3. Form into small balls and place on a baking sheet.
4. Bake for 18–20 minutes until golden and cooked through.
5. Serve warm or freeze after baking.

*In food processor, put block of cheese and shred, add cream cheese, ground sausage, and then dry ingredients that have been mixed together.

Serve with sausage gravy to dip.

Oven-Baked Omelets

All the goodness of an omelet without standing over a skillet. This is a favorite for church mornings and busy weekends.

Ingredients:

- 10 eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup shredded cheese
- 1–2 cups diced fillings (ham, peppers, onions, spinach)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x13" dish.
2. Whisk eggs, milk, salt, and pepper. Stir in cheese and fillings.
3. Pour into dish and bake for 30–40 minutes, until set in the center.
4. Let cool a few minutes before cutting into squares.

Breakfast Hash

This is a no-recipe recipe—a skillet full of whatever needs to be used up, fried until golden. Add an egg on top and you've got a filling meal.

Ingredients (suggested):

- 2 cups diced potatoes
- ½ onion, diced
- ½ bell pepper, chopped
- 1 cup cooked sausage or ham
- Eggs (optional)
- Oil or butter for frying
- Salt and pepper

Instructions:

1. Heat oil in a large skillet. Add potatoes and cook until starting to brown.
 2. Add onions and peppers, cook until soft. Stir in meat.
 3. Season well and cook until everything is golden.
 4. Top with fried or poached eggs if desired.
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Breakfast Burritos

These are a lifesaver. I keep a bag in the freezer and pull them out one at a time for quick, hearty breakfasts.

Ingredients:

- 8 large tortillas
- 10 eggs
- ½ cup milk
- 1 cup cooked sausage or bacon
- 1 cup shredded cheese
- Optional: diced potatoes or peppers

Instructions:

1. Scramble eggs with milk and cook until just set.
 2. Lay out tortillas, fill with eggs, meat, cheese, and extras.
 3. Roll tightly and wrap in foil or parchment.
 4. Freeze or refrigerate. Reheat in microwave or skillet.
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Biscuit, Egg, and Cheese Cups

Little biscuit nests filled with eggy goodness. These are fun to eat and great for portioning out ahead of time.

Ingredients:

- 1 can biscuit dough
- 6 eggs
- ½ cup shredded cheese
- Optional: crumbled bacon or sausage

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and grease muffin tin.
 2. Press biscuit dough into each cup to form a shell.
 3. Whisk eggs and cheese, stir in meat.
 4. Pour into biscuit cups and bake 20–25 minutes.
 5. Cool slightly before removing. Freeze well!
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Cheesy Scrambled Eggs with Herbs

Soft, creamy scrambled eggs with just a hint of something fresh. A simple dish that's easy to dress up.

Ingredients:

- 6 eggs
- ¼ cup milk or cream
- ½ cup shredded cheese
- 1 Tbsp butter
- Chopped fresh parsley or chives
- Salt and pepper

Instructions:

1. Whisk eggs, milk, salt, and pepper.
 2. Melt butter in a skillet over medium-low heat.
 3. Add eggs and cook slowly, stirring often.
 4. Just before set, stir in cheese and herbs.
 5. Serve warm.
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Fried Potatoes and Eggs

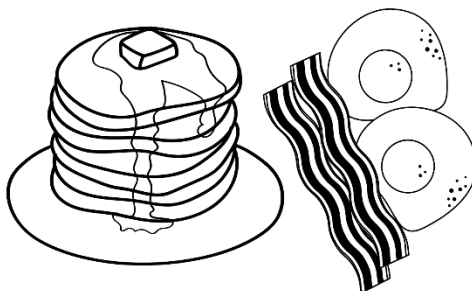
Old-fashioned and satisfying. This is how I use up leftover baked potatoes.

Ingredients:

- 2–3 cooked potatoes, sliced or diced
- 2 Tbsp oil or butter
- Salt and pepper
- 2–4 eggs

Instructions:

1. Heat oil in skillet, add potatoes and cook until browned and crispy.
 2. Season with salt and pepper.
 3. Crack eggs over the top and cover.
 4. Cook until eggs are set to your liking.
 5. Serve right out of the pan.
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Homemade & From-Scratch Staples

There's just something about making things from scratch. It doesn't have to be complicated or fussy—in fact, I've found that the simpler recipes are the ones I return to most. Whether it's baking a batch of bagels on a slow morning or whipping up homemade syrup when the bottle runs dry, these are the everyday staples that make the kitchen feel like home. I hope you'll find a few that become favorites in your own family too.



Basic Granola

I've made this a hundred different ways, depending on what I have. It's perfect with milk, yogurt, or just by the handful.

Ingredients:

- 3 cups rolled oats
- ½ cup chopped nuts (almonds, pecans, walnuts)
- ¼ cup oil (coconut or vegetable)
- ¼ cup maple syrup or honey
- 1 tsp vanilla
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- Pinch of salt

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 300°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment.
 2. In a large bowl, mix oats, nuts, cinnamon, and salt.
 3. In a saucepan, warm oil, syrup, and vanilla. Pour over oats and stir.
 4. Spread mixture on pan and bake 30–35 minutes, stirring halfway.
 5. Let cool completely—it will crisp as it cools. Store in an airtight jar.
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Chocolate Granola

A little chocolate goes a long way to make breakfast feel like a treat.

Ingredients:

- 3 cups rolled oats
- ½ cup chopped nuts
- ¼ cup cocoa powder
- ¼ cup oil
- ⅓ cup maple syrup or honey
- ½ tsp vanilla
- ¼ tsp salt
- Optional: mini chocolate chips or coconut flakes

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 300°F and line a baking sheet.
 2. Mix oats, nuts, cocoa powder, and salt in a large bowl.
 3. Heat oil and syrup, then stir in vanilla. Combine with oat mixture.
 4. Spread evenly on baking sheet and bake 30–35 minutes, stirring halfway.
 5. Once cool, stir in chocolate chips or coconut if using. Store in a jar.
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Homemade Pancake Syrup

When the syrup bottle is empty, this little recipe saves the morning.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup white sugar
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1 cup water
- ½ tsp maple extract
- Dash of vanilla (optional)

Instructions:

1. In a small saucepan, combine sugars and water.
 2. Bring to a boil and simmer 4–5 minutes until slightly thickened.
 3. Remove from heat and stir in maple extract (and vanilla if using).
 4. Let cool a bit before serving. Store in a jar in the fridge for a week or two.
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Cinnamon Honey Butter

A cozy, spreadable topping that's ready in minutes. Great on toast, pancakes, or muffins.

Ingredients:

- ½ cup softened butter
- ¼ cup honey
- 1 tsp cinnamon

Instructions:

1. In a bowl, mix all ingredients until smooth and fluffy.
 2. Spoon into a small container or jar.
 3. Store at room temp if using soon, or refrigerate.
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Homemade Fruit Jam

I use whatever's in season or in the freezer—berries, peaches, even applesauce. No canning needed for small batches.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups chopped fruit
- ½ cup sugar (adjust to taste)
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- Optional: 1 Tbsp chia seeds or 1 Tbsp cornstarch

Instructions:

1. In a saucepan, combine fruit, sugar, and lemon juice.
 2. Cook over medium heat, stirring, until fruit breaks down (10–15 minutes).
 3. If using chia seeds, stir them in and cool. If thickening with cornstarch, dissolve it in 1 Tbsp water and stir into hot jam.
 4. Cool and store in a jar in the fridge.
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White Wheat Banana Bread

A good-for-you banana bread with soft texture and just enough sweetness. Perfect for breakfast or a snack with coffee.

Ingredients:

- 2 ripe bananas, mashed
- 1/3 cup oil or melted butter
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 cup white whole wheat flour
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- Pinch of salt

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and grease a loaf pan.
2. Mix mashed bananas, oil, sugar, egg, and vanilla.
3. Stir in flour, baking soda, cinnamon, and salt until just combined.
4. Pour into pan and bake for 45–55 minutes until golden and toothpick comes out clean.
5. Let cool before slicing.

Homemade Grape-Nuts Cereal

This one goes way back—something our grandmas might have made in bulk and scooped into bowls all week long. It's lightly sweet, full of hearty texture, and fills the kitchen with the smell of cinnamon and vanilla as it bakes. We crumble it up and serve it in milk like cereal, or warm it up like a porridge.

Ingredients:

- 3 ½ cups whole wheat flour
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 2 cups buttermilk
- 2 tsp vanilla extract

Instructions:

1. Preheat your oven to 375°F and lightly grease a large baking sheet.
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine the flour, brown sugar, salt, baking soda, and cinnamon.
3. Stir in the buttermilk and vanilla until a thick, sticky dough forms.
4. Spread the mixture out evenly on your prepared pan. Bake for 20–25 minutes, until firm and golden.
5. Remove from the oven and let cool slightly, then break into chunks and run through a food processor or crumble by hand until it resembles coarse cereal.
6. Return to the oven at 250°F and bake another 45–60 minutes, stirring every 15 minutes, until completely dry and crisp.
7. Cool and store in a jar or airtight container. Serve cold in milk, or spoon into a bowl and pour boiling water or warm milk over for a cozy breakfast.

Cozy Bowls & Smooth Sips

Some mornings call for something warm and creamy in a bowl, while others are made for something cool and quick in a glass. These are the recipes I reach for when I want to feed my family well, but keep it simple. Whether you've got sleepy toddlers, hungry teenagers, or just yourself at the table, these cozy bowls and sips are easy, wholesome, and full of comfort.

Cheesy Bacon Grits

This dish is warm, creamy, and hits the spot when you want something savory but simple. I like to make a double batch—some for breakfast, and the rest served as a side for dinner later in the week.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups water
- 1 cup quick grits
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 4 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled
- 1 Tbsp butter
- Pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Bring water and salt to a boil. Slowly stir in grits.
2. Reduce heat to low and cook for 5–7 minutes, stirring often, until thick.
3. Remove from heat and stir in cheese, butter, bacon, and pepper.
4. Serve warm with a sprinkle of extra cheese or green onions on top.

Smoothie Bowls

This is more of a method than a recipe—thicker than a smoothie, and made to be eaten with a spoon. I let the kids build their own with toppings, and they feel like they're getting something fancy.

Base Ingredients:

- 1 banana (frozen if possible)
- ½ cup frozen berries or mango
- ½ cup yogurt
- Splash of milk or juice, as needed

Topping Ideas:

- Granola, sliced fruit, coconut flakes, chia seeds, mini chocolate chips

Instructions:

1. Blend all base ingredients until thick and smooth (add just enough liquid to blend).
2. Pour into a bowl and top with whatever you like.
3. Serve right away with a spoon.

Strawberry Smoothie

Just a few ingredients, but always so refreshing. This one gets made often in our house—especially on warm mornings when no one feels like cooking.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup frozen strawberries
- 1 banana
- ½ cup plain or vanilla yogurt
- ½ cup milk (or juice)
- Optional: honey or maple syrup to taste

Instructions:

1. Blend everything together until smooth.
 2. Add more milk to thin, or more fruit to thicken.
 3. Pour into a glass and enjoy immediately.
-

Homemade Yogurt

Once I tried making yogurt myself, I was hooked. It's so easy and so much more affordable than store-bought. We eat it with granola, fruit, or blended into smoothies.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups whole milk
- 2 Tbsp plain yogurt (with active cultures)

Instructions:

1. In a saucepan, heat milk to about 180°F (steaming but not boiling).
 2. Let cool to 110°F. Stir in the yogurt starter.
 3. Pour into a jar or bowl, cover with a towel, and let sit in a warm spot for 8–10 hours.
 4. Refrigerate and use within 1–2 weeks.
Tip: For thicker yogurt, strain it through a cheesecloth overnight.
-

Apple Pie Smoothie

All the cozy flavors of apple pie—without turning on the oven. This smoothie is filling, spiced, and perfect for fall mornings.

Ingredients:

- 1 apple, peeled and chopped
- ½ banana
- ¼ cup oats
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- 1 cup milk
- 1 tsp maple syrup (optional)
- Ice cubes or a few frozen apple slices

Instructions:

1. Blend everything until smooth.
 2. Add more milk if needed to thin.
 3. Pour into a glass and enjoy cold.
-

Peanut Butter Banana Shake

This one feels like a milkshake but is full of good things. It keeps kids full and tastes like a treat. I sometimes freeze it in popsicle molds too!

Ingredients:

- 1 banana
- 2 Tbsp peanut butter
- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup yogurt
- Optional: dash of vanilla or cocoa powder

Instructions:

1. Blend all ingredients until creamy and smooth.
2. Add a handful of ice if you want it extra cold.
3. Serve immediately or freeze leftovers in popsicle molds.

Morning Rhythm Tip:

Try prepping breakfast the night before—mix up baked oatmeal, set out the griddle for pancakes, or soak your grits. A few minutes at night can make the morning feel peaceful instead of rushed.

♥ **A Note for the Weary Mom**

If the morning feels like a whirlwind, if your eyes are barely open and the coffee hasn't kicked in—this little list is for you. You don't have to whip up a full farmhouse breakfast to feed your family well. Sometimes, it's the simple, thrown-together meals that bless our homes the most. God sees your heart, not your stove. And on the days you're running on empty, His strength shows up strong. Grace over guilt, mama—you're doing better than you think.

🍳 **10 Easy Breakfasts for Tired Mommas**

Because not every morning feels like a Pinterest moment—and that's okay.

1. **Peanut Butter Toast with Banana Slices**
A classic. Add a sprinkle of cinnamon or chia seeds for a little boost.
2. **Leftover Pancake Muffins**
Keep a batch in the freezer. Just pop them in the microwave and you're done.
3. **Granola and Yogurt in a Jar**
Layer granola, yogurt, and fruit the night before. Grab and go.
4. **Scrambled Eggs and Toast**
Quick, protein-packed, and always a hit—even if it's just buttered toast on the side.
5. **Smoothie with Whatever's in the Freezer**
Toss frozen fruit, milk, and a spoon of peanut butter in the blender—done in 2 minutes.
6. **Breakfast Burrito Wrap-Ups**
Keep tortillas, cheese, and scrambled eggs handy. Roll it up and eat it with one hand.
7. **Apple Slices with Nut Butter and Crackers**
A snacky breakfast that still counts. Add a boiled egg if there's time.
8. **Overnight Oats**
Stir together oats, milk, fruit, and a bit of honey the night before. Ready by morning.
9. **Instant Grits with Cheese**
Microwave grits, add shredded cheese, and a pinch of salt. Warm and filling.
10. **Homemade Bagel with Cream Cheese**
If you batch-make bagels, just toast and spread. Add fruit on the side if you're feeling fancy.

Breakfast for the Littlest Ones: Kids' Corner

Not every morning needs a big casserole or fancy dish—sometimes, it's the simple, cheerful foods that kids love most. These are the ones my kids request again and again. They're quick to pull together, fun to eat, and just plain comforting.

Toad in a Hole

Cut a hole in a slice of bread, butter it, and crack an egg right in the center. Cook on both sides until the egg is set and the toast is golden. Kids love to watch this one cook—and they usually gobble it up, too.

Mini Bagel Faces

Toast mini bagels and set out toppings like cream cheese, banana slices, raisins, shredded carrots, or nut butter. Let the kids build silly faces or animals before they dig in!

Pancake Dippers

Make a batch of silver-dollar pancakes and slice fruit like bananas or strawberries. Serve everything on a plate with a small dish of yogurt or syrup for dipping. It's breakfast—and playtime—all in one.

Banana Sushi

Spread a tortilla with peanut butter or cream cheese, lay a banana inside, roll it up, and slice into rounds. Fun finger food that feels like a treat.

Yogurt Parfait Cups

Layer yogurt, fruit, and granola or crushed cereal in clear cups. Let the kids make their own layers. Somehow it always tastes better when they do it themselves.

Peanut Butter Toast Shapes

Spread toast with peanut butter or sunflower butter and cut it into stars, hearts, or whatever shape you like with a cookie cutter. Add a sprinkle of cinnamon or chia seeds for fun.

Muffin Tin Mornings

Fill the cups of a muffin tin with small bites—cheese cubes, cut fruit, boiled egg slices, mini muffins, dry cereal. It feels like a breakfast sampler tray and is perfect for picky mornings.

When my babies were first learning to eat, I found myself reaching for simple, soft foods that were made with love and basic pantry staples. I didn't want anything complicated—just gentle meals that were nourishing, safe, and easy for little hands to hold. These are some of the recipes I leaned on during those early mornings, when everything felt new and tender. I hope they bring a little peace and comfort to your kitchen, too.

Zwieback Toast

This was a staple in our house when we had teething babies. The name sounds fancy, but it's really just a twice-baked biscuit that's crisp and easy to hold—kind of like a homemade teething biscuit. These get nice and dry, so they soften slowly in your little one's mouth.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 6 Tbsp sugar
- 2 ½ tsp instant yeast
- 1 ¼ tsp salt
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- ¼–½ tsp nutmeg
- 4 Tbsp softened butter
- 1 large egg
- 1 cup warm milk (about 110°F)

Instructions:

1. Combine all dough ingredients in a large bowl or mixer and knead until smooth and soft.
2. Cover and let rise for about 2 hours, until puffy.
3. Divide in half, shape each into a 12" log, and place on a parchment-lined baking sheet.
4. Let rise another 90 minutes. Preheat oven to 350°F.
5. Bake loaves for 22–24 minutes, until deep golden brown and internal temp is at least 190°F.
6. Cool completely, then let rest uncovered overnight.
7. Slice into ½" thick pieces. Lay flat on baking sheets.
8. Bake at 225°F for 1 hour, flip slices, then bake 1 hour more until dry and crisp.
9. Cool fully before storing in an airtight container.

Optional: For cinnamon toast, sprinkle tops with cinnamon sugar before second bake.

Toad in a Hole (Egg-in-the-Toast)

This was always a fun one to make together. I'd cut a circle in the center of bread, crack an egg into it, and let the kids "help" flip it when they got older.

To Make:

Butter both sides of a slice of bread. Cut out a hole in the middle and place in a hot skillet. Crack in an egg and cook until set, flipping once if desired.

Mini Egg Muffins

Bite-sized and perfect for breakfast or snack. I'd whisk up eggs and toss in a little grated veggie or cheese, then pour into mini muffin tins. Great for babies and toddlers alike.

To Make:

Mix 4 eggs with a splash of milk, finely chopped cooked veggies, and a sprinkle of cheese. Pour into greased mini muffin cups and bake at 350°F for 12–15 minutes.

No-Syrup Pancake Muffins

Perfect for baby-led weaning—no syrup needed and no mess! I'd sweeten them with banana and sometimes throw in a few blueberries.

To Make:

Mix 1 mashed banana, 1 egg, ½ cup flour, and a dash of baking powder. Spoon into mini muffin cups and bake at 350°F for 10–12 minutes, until lightly golden.

Banana Oat Baby Cookies

Just oats and banana—soft, chewy, and perfect for a first “cookie.” I'd shape them into tiny rounds and keep them on hand for snack time.

To Make:

Mash 1 ripe banana with ½ cup oats. Optional: Add a pinch of cinnamon. Scoop and flatten into little rounds. Bake at 350°F for 10–12 minutes.

Soft Baked Apple Rings

These are lovely for fall mornings or when apples are abundant. I'd slice the apples thick and let them bake low and slow until soft and fragrant.

To Make:

Slice apples into ½-inch rings. Sprinkle with a little cinnamon and bake at 300°F for 25–30 minutes, until soft and bendable.

Homemade Baby Puffs – Green Kale & Apple (Gluten & Dairy Free)

These are such a fun homemade version of the baby puffs you'd find in the store. They're soft-baked and perfect for babies starting solids around 6 months and up—just be sure your child is ready for finger foods. You can switch the kale for spinach or use pears instead of apples. My toddlers used to call these "green chips" and happily snacked on them too.

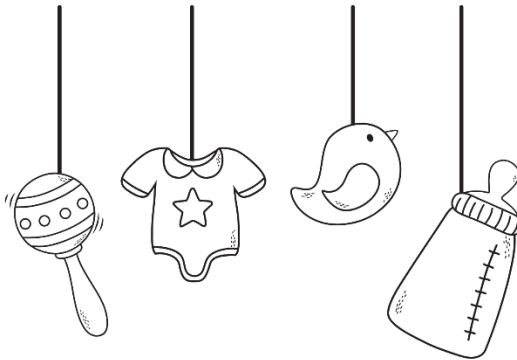
Ingredients:

- 1 Tbsp coconut oil
- 2 egg yolks (or 2 Tbsp flax meal + 6 Tbsp water for egg-free)
- 1 cup kale (lightly steamed or raw)
- ½ cup applesauce
- ½ cup instant baby rice cereal
- 1 tsp baking powder

Instructions:

1. In a food processor, blend all ingredients until a thick, smooth batter forms (about 4 minutes).
2. Spoon mixture into a piping bag or Ziploc with the corner snipped.
3. Pipe small dots onto parchment-lined baking sheets—no need for perfection!
4. Bake at 350°F for 10 minutes.
5. Reduce oven to 250°F and continue baking for 30–35 minutes, until dry to the touch.
6. Let cool fully before serving. Store in an airtight container for up to 1 week.

These are soft-baked and will not be as dry as store-bought freeze-dried puffs. Always supervise babies while eating.



Time Savers: Easy Breakfasts to Make Ahead & Freeze

Some mornings call for something warm and ready *right now*. When your hands are full and hearts are tired, having a freezer stocked with homemade goodness is a quiet kind of grace. These are the things I've learned freeze well and save my mornings more than once. Just make a big batch on a slower day and you'll be thanking yourself all week long.

1. **French Toast Sticks**

Dip thick bread slices in egg mixture, cut into sticks, bake or fry, then freeze. Reheat in toaster or oven.

2. **Pancake Muffins**

Pour your favorite pancake batter into muffin tins with blueberries or chocolate chips. Freeze and warm in the microwave or toaster oven.

3. **Waffles**

Make a double batch, cool completely, and freeze between layers of wax paper. Pop in the toaster straight from the freezer.

4. **Smoothie Packs**

Pre-portion fruit, greens, and yogurt (optional) into snack-size bags. Freeze and just dump into a blender with a splash of milk when ready.

5. **Breakfast Burritos**

Scramble eggs with sausage or veggies, wrap in tortillas, and freeze. Wrap in a damp paper towel and microwave to reheat.

6. **Egg Muffins**

Bake eggs with veggies and cheese in muffin tins. Freeze individually and reheat in microwave or air fryer.

7. **Sausage Patties**

Make your own sausage mix, shape into patties, freeze uncooked or cooked. Fry or bake straight from the freezer.

8. **Banana Bread Slices**

Slice and wrap individual pieces of banana bread or muffins. Perfect for grab-and-go with a smear of butter.

9. **Homemade Bagels**

Slice before freezing for easy toasting. Add cream cheese or sandwich fillings after reheating.

10. **Frozen Yogurt Cups or Smoothie Pops**

This one's a mom trick I use all the time. Scoop store-bought yogurt into little cups or silicone molds, top with fruit and a sprinkle of granola, and freeze. In the morning, take one out while you're waking the house and it'll be thawed just enough by breakfast.

You can also blend smoothies and freeze them in popsicle molds or small plastic cups with a popsicle stick. To keep messes down, poke the stick through a plastic lid with a small slit—it catches the drips and keeps things clean. Breakfast without fussing.

Chapter 2: Lunch in My Kitchen

There's something sweet about the quiet moments of lunch. In the middle of the day, when the morning rush has settled and the dinner prep hasn't quite begun, lunch feels like the pause button on a busy life. It's not fancy in our home—but it's honest and nourishing. Sometimes it's leftovers warmed in the oven with a slice of bread, sometimes it's grilled sandwiches and cut-up fruit, and other times it's a bubbling casserole that fills the house with homey smells.

With a house full of kids, I've learned that lunch doesn't need to be complicated—it just needs to be ready. Over the years, I've kept a few simple ingredients on hand that help me pull together something satisfying even when the pantry looks "bare." This chapter shares those real-life meals we've returned to again and again—the ones that fill bellies, bring people to the table, and remind me that a little love goes a long way in the middle of the day.



My Lunch Staples List

Here's what I try to keep on hand so I can throw together easy lunches without much fuss. These ingredients cover quick sandwiches, warm casseroles, cozy soups, and snack-style plates—whatever the day calls for.

Pantry:

- Crackers (buttery, whole grain, or saltines)
- Canned tuna or chicken
- Canned beans (black, pinto, white)
- Tomato paste and diced tomatoes
- Canned soups (for quick bases or casseroles)
- Pasta and elbow macaroni
- Peanut butter
- Tortillas or flatbread
- Rice
- Jarred salsa or pasta sauce

Refrigerator:

- Eggs
- Shredded cheese
- Sliced lunchmeat or leftover chicken
- Mustard, mayo, ranch dressing
- Fresh veggies: carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes
- Fresh fruit: apples, grapes, oranges
- Hard boiled eggs
- Yogurt (plain or flavored for dipping or sides)

Freezer:

- Sliced bread, English muffins, or buns
- Cooked ground beef or shredded chicken (in bags, ready to reheat)
- Frozen veggies (peas, corn, spinach)
- Homemade soup portions (frozen in containers)
- Shredded cheese (extra bags for backup)
- Pizza crusts or naan bread
- Quesadillas or burritos (homemade or store-bought)
- Mini meatballs

Simple Sandwiches & Toasted Favorites

There's something comforting about a sandwich—humble but full of possibility. Whether it's a warm grilled cheese on a rainy afternoon or a cold chicken salad sandwich on a sunny picnic day, sandwiches have always been a staple in our home. They're quick, filling, and you can change them up depending on what you have in the fridge. Here are some of our tried-and-true favorites:

1. Ham & Cheese Melt

A classic that never fails. Layer sliced ham and cheddar cheese between sandwich bread. Butter the outsides and grill in a pan until golden and the cheese is melty.

2. Egg Salad Sandwiches

Hard-boiled eggs, chopped and mixed with mayo, a little mustard, salt, pepper, and a sprinkle of paprika. Serve on soft bread with lettuce for a creamy bite.

3. Chicken Salad Sandwiches

Use canned or leftover shredded chicken mixed with mayo, a little pickle relish, salt, and pepper. Add grapes or chopped celery if you have them.

4. Tuna Melt

Mix tuna with mayo and a tiny bit of mustard. Pile onto bread with a slice of cheese and toast in a pan or under the broiler until bubbly.

5. Grilled Peanut Butter & Banana

Sounds funny, but it's so good. Spread peanut butter on bread, add sliced bananas, and grill like a grilled cheese until warm and toasty.

6. Tomato & Cheese Toasts

Thick bread slices topped with tomato slices, a sprinkle of salt, and a slice of cheese. Broil until bubbly—perfect with soup.

7. Veggie Hummus Wraps

Spread a tortilla with hummus and layer in thinly sliced veggies (cucumber, carrot, spinach). Roll up tight and slice in half.

8. Leftover Roast Sandwiches

Take last night's roast (chicken, pork, or beef), slice it thin, and serve it with a little BBQ sauce or mustard on a bun.

9. Salami & Cream Cheese Roll-Ups

Spread cream cheese on a tortilla, layer with salami, roll up, and slice into pinwheels for a fun finger food.

10. Toasted Turkey Apple Sandwich

Sliced turkey, thin apple slices, and cheddar on whole grain bread, toasted until the cheese melts. Sweet and savory in every bite.

Soups & Bowls

There's something comforting about scooping up lunch with a spoon. Whether it's a slow-simmered soup or a warm, saucy bowl of pasta, these meals wrap you up in warmth and fill bellies with joy. I've leaned on these recipes during busy homeschool days, quiet weekends, and those moments when everyone wants something cozy—but quick. Most of these can be doubled or made ahead, and a few even freeze beautifully.

Creamy Chicken & Rice Soup

- 1 Tbsp butter
- 1/2 onion, diced
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup cooked chicken, shredded or cubed
- 1 cup cooked white rice
- 1/2 tsp dried thyme
- 1 cup milk or half and half
- Salt and pepper to taste

In a large pot, melt butter and sauté onion, carrots, and celery until soft. Add broth, chicken, rice, and thyme. Simmer for 15 minutes. Stir in milk and season to taste. Heat through and serve.

Cheesy Potato Soup

- 4 medium potatoes, peeled and diced
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 2 Tbsp butter
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup milk
- 1 1/2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional: cooked crumbled bacon, green onions

Sauté onion in butter until soft. Add potatoes and broth. Simmer until potatoes are tender. Mash slightly, add milk and cheese, and stir until smooth. Garnish if desired.

Taco Soup

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 packet taco seasoning
- 1 can black beans, drained
- 1 can corn, drained
- 1 can diced tomatoes with green chilies
- 2 cups beef or chicken broth

Brown beef and drain. Stir in taco seasoning, beans, corn, tomatoes, and broth. Simmer for 20 minutes. Serve with tortilla chips, shredded cheese, and sour cream.

Broccoli & Grilled Chicken Pasta Bowl

- 2 cups cooked pasta
- 1 cup steamed broccoli
- 1 cup grilled chicken, chopped
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Grated parmesan to serve

Toss hot pasta with broccoli, chicken, olive oil, garlic, salt, and pepper. Sprinkle with parmesan. Serve warm.

One-Pot Cheeseburger Pasta

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 2 cups elbow macaroni
- 3 cups water
- 1/4 cup ketchup
- 1 Tbsp mustard
- 1 1/2 cups shredded cheddar

Brown beef and onion. Add macaroni, water, ketchup, and mustard. Bring to boil, cover and simmer until pasta is tender. Stir in cheese until melted.

Macaroni & Tomatoes

- 2 cups elbow macaroni
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 2 Tbsp butter
- 1 tsp sugar
- Salt and pepper to taste

Cook macaroni and drain. Stir in tomatoes, butter, sugar, salt, and pepper. Heat through and serve.

Easy Pasta Fagioli

- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 1 can cannellini or pinto beans, drained
- 2 cups small pasta
- 4 cups chicken broth

Sauté onion and garlic in olive oil. Add tomatoes, beans, broth, and pasta. Simmer until pasta is tender. Season to taste.

Chicken Alfredo Bowls

- 2 cups cooked pasta
- 1 cup cooked chicken
- 1 cup Alfredo sauce (jarred or homemade)
- 1/4 cup grated parmesan

Combine pasta, chicken, and Alfredo sauce in a pot. Heat through, sprinkle with parmesan, and serve.

Creamy Tomato Basil Soup

- 2 Tbsp butter
- 1/2 onion, diced
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 can crushed tomatoes (28 oz)
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1/2 cup heavy cream

Sauté onion and garlic in butter. Add tomatoes, basil, and broth. Simmer 15 minutes. Blend smooth and stir in cream.

Broccoli Cheddar Soup

- 2 cups chopped broccoli
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 2 Tbsp butter
- 2 Tbsp flour
- 2 cups milk
- 1 1/2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

Sauté onion in butter. Stir in flour. Gradually whisk in milk. Add broccoli and simmer until soft. Stir in cheese and blend if desired.

Salads & Wraps

There's something comforting about a good salad or wrap—especially when you've got just the right ingredients on hand. Whether you're working through leftovers or making a fresh garden pick, these recipes are perfect for warm days, busy afternoons, or lighter meals that still satisfy.

Classic Chicken Salad

A creamy, crunchy mix that's great on its own or scooped into a sandwich.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked chicken, chopped
- ½ cup mayo
- 1 stalk celery, diced
- 1 Tbsp chopped onion
- Salt & pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Stir all ingredients together in a bowl.
 2. Chill for at least 30 minutes before serving.
 3. Serve on bread, crackers, or lettuce wraps.
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Ranch Chicken Wraps

These are a lunchtime favorite—easy to prep and pack.

Ingredients:

- 2 large tortillas
- 1 cup cooked chicken, shredded
- ¼ cup shredded cheddar
- 2 Tbsp ranch dressing
- Lettuce, chopped

Instructions:

1. Mix chicken with cheese and ranch.
 2. Lay on a tortilla, top with lettuce, and roll up tightly.
 3. Cut in half and serve.
-

Creamy Cucumber Salad

Cool, crisp, and perfect with anything hot off the stove.

Ingredients:

- 2 large cucumbers, sliced thin
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 Tbsp vinegar
- 1 tsp sugar
- Salt and dill to taste

Instructions:

1. Mix dressing ingredients in a bowl.
 2. Add cucumbers and toss to coat.
 3. Chill until ready to serve.
-

BLT Pasta Salad

All the flavors of a BLT, tossed with pasta for a crowd-pleasing side.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked pasta
- 1 cup chopped tomatoes
- ½ cup cooked bacon, crumbled
- ½ cup mayo
- 1 cup chopped lettuce

Instructions:

1. Stir everything but lettuce together.
 2. Add lettuce right before serving so it stays crisp.
-

Tuna Salad Lettuce Wraps

Simple and protein-packed.

Ingredients:

- 1 can tuna, drained
- 2 Tbsp mayo or plain yogurt
- 1 Tbsp relish or chopped pickle
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Romaine leaves

Instructions:

1. Mix tuna, mayo, relish, and seasonings.
 2. Scoop into lettuce leaves and serve.
-

Chopped Garden Salad

Great way to use up whatever's in the fridge.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups mixed greens or chopped romaine
- ½ cup chopped cucumber
- ½ cup cherry tomatoes
- ¼ cup shredded carrots
- 2 Tbsp dressing of choice

Instructions:

1. Toss everything together right before serving.
2. Add nuts, seeds, or croutons for extra crunch.

Chicken Caesar Wraps

A wrap version of the classic.

Ingredients:

- 2 tortillas
- 1 cup grilled chicken, sliced
- ¼ cup Caesar dressing
- ¼ cup shredded Parmesan
- 1 cup romaine, chopped

Instructions:

1. Toss chicken, dressing, cheese, and lettuce together.
 2. Spoon into tortillas and roll up.
-

Fruit & Nut Salad with Honey Dressing

Sweet, fresh, and filling.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups spinach or spring mix
- ¼ cup dried cranberries
- ¼ cup chopped nuts (walnuts or pecans)
- ¼ cup crumbled feta or goat cheese
- 1 Tbsp honey + 1 Tbsp olive oil + 1 tsp vinegar (for dressing)

Instructions:

1. Whisk together dressing.
 2. Toss all ingredients and drizzle dressing on top.
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Black Bean Corn Salad Wraps This is a fresh wrap with a Tex-Mex twist—great warm or cold.

Ingredients:

- 1 can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup corn (frozen or canned)
- ¼ cup diced red onion
- ¼ cup chopped cilantro
- Juice of 1 lime
- Salt to taste
- 2 large tortillas

Instructions:

1. Mix all ingredients together.
2. Spoon into tortillas and wrap tightly.
3. Serve with sour cream or avocado if you like.

Comfort Food Lunches

These meals bring that cozy, homemade feel to the middle of the day. Whether it's a bubbling casserole, a cheesy mac and hot dog bake, or crispy homemade nuggets, these are the kind of lunches that fill bellies and bring everyone to the table with a smile. Perfect for prepping ahead or serving up fresh while the kids take a school break.

Lentil and Rice Casserole

Simple ingredients, big flavor. This casserole bakes up hearty and delicious.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup brown or green lentils
- ½ cup uncooked rice
- 1 small onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 ½ cups broth (vegetable or chicken)
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp thyme

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
 2. Combine all ingredients in a greased 9x13 baking dish.
 3. Cover with foil and bake for 1 hour, or until rice and lentils are tender.
 4. Fluff with a fork and serve with a sprinkle of cheese if desired.
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Black Beans and Rice Bake

A cozy, budget-friendly casserole that's easy to throw together.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup cooked rice
- 1 can black beans, drained and rinsed
- ½ cup salsa
- ½ cup shredded cheese
- 1 tsp cumin
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Stir everything but cheese together in a bowl.
2. Pour into a greased baking dish.
3. Top with cheese and bake at 350°F for 25–30 minutes.

Tuna Noodle Casserole

Comfort food that's easy on the pantry.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked pasta
- 1 can tuna, drained
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup frozen peas
- ½ cup shredded cheese
- Breadcrumbs for topping (optional)

Instructions:

1. Mix everything together except breadcrumbs.
 2. Spoon into greased casserole dish.
 3. Sprinkle with breadcrumbs if using.
 4. Bake at 375°F for 25–30 minutes.
-

Chicken and Rice Bake

Classic and filling.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup uncooked rice
- 2 cups cooked chicken, chopped
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1 ½ cups broth or milk
- 1 cup frozen mixed veggies

Instructions:

1. Stir all ingredients together in a baking dish.
 2. Cover with foil and bake at 375°F for 40–45 minutes, until rice is cooked through.
-

Macaroni Beef Skillet Bake

Quick to mix and family-friendly.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked macaroni
- 1 lb ground beef, browned
- 1 can diced tomatoes (with juice)
- 1 cup shredded cheddar
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Combine all ingredients in a baking dish.
 2. Top with cheese and bake at 350°F for 20 minutes.
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Zucchini Rice Casserole

An easy way to sneak in vegetables.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup cooked rice
- 1 cup grated zucchini
- ½ cup shredded cheese
- 1 egg
- ¼ cup milk
- 1 tsp onion powder

Instructions:

1. Mix everything together in a bowl.
 2. Pour into greased 8x8 baking dish.
 3. Bake at 375°F for 30–35 minutes.
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Homemade Chicken Nuggets or Patties

We love making our own chicken nuggets or patties because it's cheaper than store-bought, tastes better, and you know exactly what's going into them. I usually start with boneless skinless chicken breast and pulse it in my food processor—it's simple and saves money.

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs ground chicken breast (make your own in the food processor for best price!)
- ½ cup plain breadcrumbs
- 1 egg
- ½ tsp paprika
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- ½ tsp onion powder
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp yellow mustard
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- Extra breadcrumbs for coating
- Oil for frying

Directions:

In a large bowl, mix the ground chicken with breadcrumbs, egg, and all the seasonings. Don't skip the mustard and Worcestershire—they give it that savory depth that makes these so good! Once mixed, shape into nugget-sized pieces or larger patties depending on what you need. Coat each one in extra breadcrumbs.

Heat oil in a skillet over medium heat and fry the nuggets or patties until golden brown on both sides and cooked through, about 4–5 minutes per side. Drain on paper towels.

Tip: These freeze well after cooking—just cool completely, flash freeze on a tray, then transfer to a bag for easy meals later.

Mac and Cheese with Hot Dogs and Peas

This is one of those classic, humble dinners that shows up when you need something filling, frugal, and kid-approved. It's homemade, but not fussy—just creamy mac and cheese with hot dogs and peas baked together into a bubbly, comforting dish.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb elbow macaroni (or any small pasta)
- 1½ cups milk
- 1 can cheddar cheese soup
- 1½ cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 2 tsp chicken bouillon powder
- 6–8 hot dogs, sliced
- 1½ cups frozen peas

Directions:

Cook pasta according to the package directions. Drain and return to the pot. Add in the milk, cheddar cheese soup, shredded cheese, salt, pepper, and chicken bouillon. Stir over low heat until melted and creamy. Add in sliced hot dogs and frozen peas (no need to thaw them first). Mix well, then pour everything into a greased 9x13 baking dish. Bake at 350°F for 25–30 minutes, or until hot and bubbly with a lightly golden top.

Tip: This makes great leftovers for lunch the next day—just reheat with a splash of milk to bring back the creaminess.



Lunchbox Fillers & Snack Plates

When the day is full and time is short, these little meals come in handy. Whether you're packing a lunchbox, setting out a snack tray, or feeding a few kids in the middle of their homeschool day, these ideas are simple, satisfying, and easy to mix and match.

PB&J Pinwheels

A fun twist on a classic sandwich—perfect for tiny hands or bento boxes.

Ingredients:

- 2 slices of bread
- 2 Tbsp peanut butter
- 2 Tbsp jelly

Instructions:

1. Trim crusts and flatten bread slightly with a rolling pin.
 2. Spread peanut butter and jelly, roll tightly, and slice into pinwheels.
 3. Store in an airtight container or serve right away.
-

Homemade Lunchables Tray

Customize with whatever your family loves.

Ideas:

- Crackers
- Sliced cheese
- Deli meat or leftover chicken
- Baby carrots or sliced cucumbers
- Fruit (grapes, apple slices, berries)

Pack each in a compartment or on a tray for easy grab-and-go eating.

Cheese Quesadilla Wedges

A fast favorite—these store well and reheat easily.

Ingredients:

- 1 tortilla
- ¼ cup shredded cheese

Instructions:

1. Sprinkle cheese on one half of the tortilla.
 2. Fold over and heat in a pan until golden and melted.
 3. Slice into triangles and serve with salsa or sour cream.
-

Mini Veggie Muffins

Soft, savory, and sneaky with vegetables.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup flour
- ½ cup grated zucchini or carrots
- 1 egg
- ½ cup milk
- ¼ cup shredded cheese
- 1 tsp baking powder

Instructions:

1. Mix all ingredients and pour into mini muffin tins.
 2. Bake at 375°F for 12–15 minutes, until set and golden.
-

Hard-Boiled Eggs with Crackers and Fruit

A filling trio for an easy protein-rich lunch.

Ideas:

- 1–2 hard-boiled eggs, peeled
 - A handful of whole-grain crackers
 - Sliced strawberries or orange wedges
-

Turkey & Cheese Roll-Ups

No bread needed, just roll and go.

Ingredients:

- 2 slices turkey
- 2 slices cheese

Instructions:

1. Layer cheese on turkey and roll up tightly.
 2. Slice into bite-sized spirals if desired.
-

Fruit & Yogurt Parfait Cups

A little sweet, a little tangy, and very refreshing.

Ingredients:

- ½ cup yogurt
- ¼ cup fruit (fresh or frozen)
- 1 Tbsp granola or oats

Instructions:

1. Layer yogurt, fruit, and granola in a small cup.
 2. Chill until ready to serve.
-

Mini Bagel Sandwiches

Great for little hands and big appetites.

Ideas:

- Cream cheese & cucumber
- Ham & cheddar
- Turkey & tomato

Slice mini bagels and fill with favorite toppings. Wrap for lunchboxes or serve fresh.

Hummus & Dippers

This one's a favorite snack plate.

Ideas:

- ¼ cup hummus
- Carrot sticks, bell pepper slices, pita chips

Serve in a divided container for easy dipping.

Apple Sandwiches

Crunchy and naturally sweet.

Ingredients:

- 1 apple, sliced into rounds
- Peanut butter or almond butter

Instructions:

1. Spread nut butter between two apple rounds to make "sandwiches."
2. Optional: sprinkle with raisins or granola for crunch.

Simple Lunch Tip:

Don't overthink it. A warm sandwich, cut-up fruit, and a little something sweet is more than enough to nourish your family and bless your table.



More Gentle Ideas for Growing Appetites

Soft, simple, and full of nourishment—these ideas were staples during the baby years in my kitchen. They're not fussy, don't require fancy ingredients, and most importantly, they're loved by little ones learning how to eat.

1. Mashed Sweet Potato & Banana Mash

A naturally sweet blend that's smooth and gentle on the tummy. Just mash cooked sweet potato with ripe banana and serve warm.

2. Soft Scrambled Eggs with Avocado

Whisked eggs cooked low and slow until soft, then mixed with mashed avocado. Creamy and full of healthy fats.

3. Mini Lentil Patties

Cook red lentils until very soft, mix with mashed sweet potato or carrot, and form into mini patties. Pan-sear lightly or bake.

4. Quinoa Banana Mash

Cook quinoa until soft and mix with mashed banana and a bit of breast milk or formula for moisture.

5. Creamy Polenta with Pear

Soft-cooked polenta stirred with grated or pureed pear. Warm and comforting.

6. Buttery Steamed Carrots with Rice

Steam carrot chunks until very soft and mash into cooked rice with a tiny bit of butter or olive oil.

7. Soft Tofu Cubes

No prep needed! Just cut firm tofu into small cubes—cool, soft, and great for self-feeding.

8. Applesauce & Oat Mash

Stir baby oats into warm unsweetened applesauce for a quick spoonable lunch.

9. Mini Chicken & Veggie Meatballs

Ground chicken mixed with finely shredded zucchini and carrots, baked into tiny meatballs and served soft.

10. Broccoli Potato Mash

Steam broccoli and potatoes until soft, mash together, and add a touch of olive oil or unsalted butter.



Homemade & From-Scratch Staples for Lunch

There's something deeply satisfying about making the basics yourself. These are the little things I've come to rely on—simple, homemade staples that round out a lunchbox, fill snack trays, or elevate a simple meal with comfort and flavor. You'll save money, avoid unnecessary ingredients, and feel that quiet joy that comes from feeding your family with your own hands.

Homemade Hummus

Creamy, protein-rich, and perfect for dipping veggies or spreading in wraps.

Ingredients:

- 1 can chickpeas, drained
- 2 Tbsp tahini
- 1 clove garlic
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2–3 Tbsp olive oil
- Salt to taste
- Water to thin, as needed

Instructions:

1. Blend all ingredients in a food processor until smooth.
 2. Add more olive oil or water for a creamier consistency.
 3. Store in the fridge up to 5 days.
-

Easy Cheese Crackers

Crunchy little bites that are great for lunchboxes or snack plates.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup shredded cheddar
- ½ cup flour
- 2 Tbsp butter
- 1–2 Tbsp cold water

Instructions:

1. Blend all ingredients until a dough forms.
 2. Roll out and cut into small squares.
 3. Bake at 375°F for 12–15 minutes or until golden.
-

Tortilla Chips from Scratch

Simple and salty—perfect for dips or soups.

Ingredients:

- 4 small tortillas
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- Salt

Instructions:

1. Cut tortillas into triangles, brush with oil, and sprinkle with salt.
 2. Bake at 350°F for 10–12 minutes, flipping halfway through.
-

Hard-Boiled Eggs

A reliable protein to keep on hand for quick lunches or to add to salads.

Instructions:

1. Place eggs in a pot, cover with water, and bring to a boil.
 2. Turn off heat, cover, and let sit 12 minutes.
 3. Cool in ice water and peel.
-

Homemade Ranch Dip

Better than store-bought and made with pantry spices.

Ingredients:

- ½ cup sour cream
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 1 tsp dried dill
- ½ tsp onion powder
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Stir all ingredients together. Chill before serving with veggies.
-

Simple Pasta Salad Base

Great to mix with whatever you have on hand.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked pasta
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 Tbsp vinegar
- Salt & pepper

Ideas to add:

- Diced veggies
 - Cheese cubes
 - Shredded chicken or tuna
-

Homemade Flatbread

Soft and chewy—perfect for wraps or dipping.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- ¾ cup warm water
- 2 Tbsp olive oil

Instructions:

1. Mix to form dough and divide into 6 balls.
 2. Roll out and cook on a hot skillet 2–3 minutes per side.
-

Quick Pickled Veggies

Add crunch and flavor to sandwiches or wraps.

Ingredients:

- ½ cup vinegar
- ½ cup water
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp sugar
- Sliced carrots, cucumbers, or onions

Instructions:

1. Mix brine ingredients and pour over veggies in a jar.
2. Chill for at least 2 hours.

Homemaking Rhythm:

Try doubling lunch recipes once or twice a week—extras can go straight into the freezer or become tomorrow's easy dinner. It's a quiet way to save time without extra work.

Time Savers for Easy Lunches

Some days just move faster than others—and having a few homemade things stashed in the freezer or prepped ahead can make all the difference. These are tried-and-true lunch items I like to double up on and keep ready. Pull them out, warm them up, and breathe a little easier knowing lunch is already halfway made.

1. Frozen Burritos

Wrap up tortillas with beans, cheese, and a little rice or meat. Wrap individually and freeze. Microwave or toast in a skillet straight from the freezer.

2. Mini Quesadillas

Make and slice ahead, then freeze in layers with parchment paper. Heat in a pan or oven until warm and crispy.

3. Freezer-Friendly Pasta Cups

Scoop leftover mac and cheese or spaghetti into muffin tins. Freeze, then pop out and store in bags. Reheat in microwave-safe dishes.

4. Frozen Veggie Nuggets

Make homemade veggie or lentil nuggets and freeze before or after baking. Heat in oven or air fryer.

5. Homemade Pizza Bagels

Top bagel halves with sauce, cheese, and toppings. Freeze on a tray, then store in bags. Bake until bubbly.

6. Soup in Single Servings

Ladle leftover soup into small containers or freezer-safe bags. Perfect for quick warm-up lunches.

7. Frozen Flatbreads or Pitas

Homemade or store-bought, these freeze beautifully. Pull out and toast for wraps, pizzas, or dipping.

8. Make-Ahead Pasta Salad Packs

Toss cooked pasta with oil, chopped veggies, and cheese. Keep in containers for grab-and-go lunches for a few days.

9. Hummus Cups & Veggies

Scoop hummus into small lidded containers and keep cut veggies in water in the fridge. Lasts all week.

10. Yogurt Lunch Cups (Frozen)

Scoop store-bought yogurt into small freezer-safe containers, top with fruit and granola, and freeze. Pull out in the morning—it'll thaw by lunch.

10 Easy Lunches for Harried, Busy Mommas

Some days feel like a blur—you're bouncing between laundry piles, hungry kids, homeschool lessons, and your own thoughts. On those days, lunch doesn't have to be fancy. It just needs to be nourishing, quick, and something you don't have to overthink. This little list is your gentle reminder that simple is still beautiful, and feeding your family doesn't have to mean fussing.

1. Quesadillas with Leftovers

Tortilla + cheese + anything from last night's dinner = magic. Heat and slice.

2. Eggs and Toast

Hard-boiled, scrambled, or fried—served with buttered toast or leftover bread.

3. Cheese & Crackers Plate

Add fruit, nuts, deli meat, or even raisins. It's a lunchable with love.

4. Peanut Butter Banana Sandwiches

Fast, filling, and always a hit—bonus if you toast the bread.

5. Mac and Cheese (from a box or scratch)

Add frozen peas or cut-up hot dogs to stretch it further.

6. Tuna Salad with Crackers or Bread

Mix tuna with mayo or plain yogurt. Serve it as a dip or sandwich.

7. Avocado Toast with a Fried Egg

Hearty and full of good fats—don't forget a sprinkle of salt.

8. Leftover Soup & a Biscuit

Reheat soup and serve with any leftover roll, biscuit, or even a piece of toast.

9. Pasta with Butter and Parmesan

Simple comfort food. Add broccoli or shredded chicken if you have it.

10. Smoothie & Muffin Combo

A fruit smoothie + a muffin from the freezer = fast and satisfying.

Gather the Fragments: Leftovers Made Lovely

One of the most beautiful habits of old-fashioned homemaking is using what we have—stretching every bit, turning yesterday’s meal into today’s blessing. In John 6:12, Jesus said, *“Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.”* That little verse has always stuck with me. It’s become a homemaking mindset: nothing wasted, everything repurposed with care.

Here are some lunch ideas to help you gather the fragments from dinner and make something new—without extra stress.

Leftover Chicken

- **Chicken Salad Sandwiches** – Mix with mayo, mustard, a little pickle or relish.
 - **BBQ Chicken Quesadillas** – Shred and toss in barbecue sauce, then press between tortillas with cheese.
 - **Chicken Pasta Bowls** – Add to warm pasta with butter, garlic, or a splash of dressing.
 - **Chicken Wraps** – Roll in a tortilla with lettuce, tomato, and ranch or hummus.
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Leftover Taco Meat

- **Taco Salad** – Add to lettuce with shredded cheese, salsa, and crushed chips.
 - **Nacho Plates** – Sprinkle over chips, top with cheese, and broil until melted.
 - **Mini Taco Cups** – Scoop into muffin tin shells or tortillas and bake.
 - **Taco Scramble** – Add to scrambled eggs for a Tex-Mex twist.
-

Leftover Pasta

- **Cold Pasta Salad** – Add olives, chopped veggies, and vinaigrette.
 - **Cheesy Pasta Bake** – Stir in a little sauce and shredded cheese, then bake until bubbly.
 - **Soup Stir-In** – Mix into broth with extra veggies for a hearty soup.
 - **Pasta Melt Wraps** – Wrap pasta with cheese in a tortilla and grill.
-

Bits from the Fridge

- **Stir-Fry Rice Bowls** – Toss leftover veggies and rice in a skillet with soy sauce or sesame oil.
- **Breakfast-for-Lunch Hash** – Mix meat, potatoes, and eggs in a skillet.

- **Snacky Lunch Plate** – Crackers, fruit, cheese, nuts, or whatever needs used up.
- **Frittata** – Use up small amounts of cheese, veggies, or meat in a baked egg dish.

These little fragments can become a feast when gathered with love. Homemaking doesn't always look like a perfect plan—it's often just doing the next right thing with what's already in front of you.

After Lunch Moments

Once the plates are cleared and little bellies are full, I've found that the quietest magic often happens in the moments that follow. A quick clean-up routine—rinsing dishes, wiping counters, sweeping crumbs—can make the rest of the day feel more peaceful. I like to keep a small bin handy for lunchtime messes: dishcloths, a spray bottle, and a broom tucked nearby so we're back to calm in five minutes flat. Then, it's story time. Even just one chapter or picture book helps everyone settle down. After that, a little rest—whether it's a nap, quiet time in bedrooms, or just soft music and puzzles—helps us all reset before the afternoon unfolds. It doesn't have to be perfect. But building a little rhythm into the after-lunch hour can be the difference between a frazzled day and a peaceful one.

Heart of the Home:

Lunch isn't just a meal—it's a pause in the day to reconnect, reset, and refuel. Even ten calm minutes at the table can change the tone of the whole afternoon.

Chapter 3: Afternoon Snacks & Pick-Me-Ups

When the house grows quiet or the energy starts to fade, it's time for a little something from the kitchen. Maybe it's a plate of warm muffins between math lessons or a simple slice of toast with tea while the littles nap. These snacks aren't just to fill bellies—they're little moments of pause and comfort in the day. They keep us going, give the kids a cheerful bite, and remind us that nourishment doesn't always have to be big or fancy—it just has to be made with love.



Snack Staples to Keep On Hand

A little planning goes a long way when it comes to keeping snacks simple and stress-free. These are the items I like to always have tucked in my pantry, fridge, or freezer—so when the munchies strike (and they always do), I've got options ready.

Pantry Staples

- Old-fashioned oats (for granola, energy bites, or muffins)
- Peanut butter or nut butter
- Crackers (whole wheat or gluten-free)
- Trail mix or ingredients to make your own (nuts, dried fruit, seeds, chocolate chips)
- Granola or dry cereal for topping yogurt
- Applesauce cups or pouches
- Rice cakes or popcorn
- Cinnamon and honey for toast or warm apples
- Graham crackers and pretzels (for dunking or snack plates)

Refrigerator Staples

- Block or sliced cheese (cheddar, mozzarella, cream cheese)
- Yogurt (plain or flavored)
- Fresh fruit (apples, berries, grapes, bananas)
- Hummus or bean dip
- Hard-boiled eggs (prepped for grab-and-go protein)
- Cut veggies like cucumbers, carrots, or bell peppers
- Tortillas (for quick quesadillas or roll-ups)
- Jam or homemade fruit spread
- Milk (for smoothies or tea time)

Freezer Staples

- Muffins or banana bread slices (freeze individually wrapped)
- Frozen smoothie packs (fruit + spinach + yogurt, ready to blend)
- Smoothie pops or yogurt tubes
- Mini bagels or rolls
- Pre-baked cookies (you can even freeze dough balls and bake when needed)
- Cheese cubes or shredded cheese in baggies
- Frozen berries for parfaits, oatmeal, or baking
- Cooked puffs or veggie muffins for toddlers
- Pancake or waffle sticks from breakfast leftovers

Oven-Baked Snacks

Warm from the Oven, Made with Love

There's something about a baked treat that slows time down just a little. Maybe it's the smell drifting from the oven or the warmth that fills the kitchen. Whether it's cookies on a cooling rack or muffins wrapped in napkins for a snack-on-the-go, these oven-baked goodies feel like a little gift in the middle of the day.

These are the kinds of snacks that make your house smell like home. Some are rich and sweet, others soft and simple—but all of them are keepers. I make them when I've got a little extra time, when I want to surprise the kids, or when we just need a good old-fashioned "something" to go with a cup of milk or coffee.

Chocolate Chip Pumpkin Muffins (Small Family Batch)

This recipe is the perfect size for a smaller crowd—but you can double it for a full house! Moist, rich, and loaded with chocolate chips, these are a fall favorite that shows up year-round in our home.

Ingredients:

- 3 eggs, well beaten
- 3/4 cup oil
- 2 1/4 cups sugar
- 2 1/4 cups canned pumpkin
- 2 1/2 cups flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1 1/2 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp nutmeg
- 1 package chocolate chips

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. In a large bowl, beat eggs, oil, sugar, and pumpkin until smooth.
3. In a separate bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, and nutmeg.
4. Blend the dry into the wet mixture. Stir in chocolate chips.
5. Spoon into greased muffin tins.
6. Bake for 30–40 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean. Cool and enjoy!

3-Ingredient Peanut Butter Cookies

So easy, no flour, and always soft. A favorite for when I don't want to make a mess but still want a treat!

Ingredients:

- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 egg

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
 2. Mix all ingredients until smooth.
 3. Roll into balls, flatten with a fork in a criss-cross pattern.
 4. Bake 10–12 minutes until edges are set. Cool on pan.
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Twix Bar Cookies

These are a crowd-pleaser and look fancier than the effort it takes. Layers of buttery cookie, soft caramel, and smooth chocolate make them a treat to remember.

Cookie Base:

- 1 1/2 cups butter, softened
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 1 1/2 tsp vanilla
- 3 cups flour
- 1/4 tsp salt

Caramel Layer:

- 11 oz caramel (wrapped or chips)
- A splash of milk

Chocolate Topping:

- 2 cups chocolate chips
- 1 tbsp milk
- 2 tsp shortening

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
 2. Mix cookie base ingredients until soft dough forms. Press into a greased 9x13-inch pan.
 3. Bake for 20–25 minutes or until lightly golden. Cool completely.
 4. Melt caramels with milk until smooth. Spread over cooled cookie base. Let set.
 5. Melt chocolate chips, milk, and shortening together. Spread over caramel layer.
 6. Chill until firm, then cut into squares.
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Lofthouse-Style Sugar Cookies

Soft, pillowy cookies with that classic bakery frosting and sprinkles. The key is the sifted flour—don't skip it!

Cookies:

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1 1/4 cups powdered sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 2 1/2 cups cake flour*
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp salt

*To make cake flour: Use 1 cup regular flour, remove 2 Tbsp, and replace with 2 Tbsp cornstarch. Sift well.

Frosting:

- 1 1/3 cups butter, softened
- 2 1/2 cups powdered sugar
- 1/2 tsp vanilla
- 2 Tbsp milk
- Sprinkles

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
 2. Cream butter and sugar. Beat in egg and vanilla.
 3. In a separate bowl, sift flour, baking powder, and salt several times.
 4. Mix dry into wet ingredients just until combined.
 5. Roll dough into balls and slightly flatten on parchment-lined baking sheet.
 6. Bake 10–12 minutes until just set. Cool completely.
 7. Beat frosting ingredients until fluffy. Spread on cooled cookies and top with sprinkles.
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Cinnamon Sugar Muffins

Simple, cozy, and quick. These are our “almost-donut” muffins for slow mornings or afternoon snacks.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 1 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/2 cup milk

Topping:

- 1/4 cup butter, melted
- 1/2 cup sugar mixed with 1 tsp cinnamon

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Cream butter and sugar. Add egg.
3. Mix in flour, baking powder, salt, and milk.
4. Scoop into muffin tins and bake for 18–20 minutes.
5. While warm, dip tops in melted butter, then into cinnamon sugar.

☀ **Homemade Twinkies**

Soft, golden sponge cake filled with sweet cream—these homemade Twinkies are worth the effort. They taste like childhood but feel a little more wholesome (and made with love, not a wrapper!).

Yellow Cake Base:

- 4 eggs, room temperature
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1/3 cup water
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 tsp salt

Filling:

- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 1/2 cup shortening
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1/4 cup marshmallow fluff (or more to taste)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a Twinkie mold or use a mini loaf pan.
2. Beat eggs and sugar until thick and pale. Add vanilla and water.
3. Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt. Fold gently into egg mixture.
4. Spoon batter into prepared molds, filling about 2/3 full.
5. Bake 12–15 minutes or until golden and springy. Let cool completely.
6. For filling: Beat butter and shortening until smooth. Add powdered sugar, vanilla, and marshmallow fluff. Whip until fluffy.
7. Use a piping bag to insert filling into the bottom or cut cakes lengthwise and spread filling inside.

💛 **Gentle Encouragement:**

It's okay if snacks look the same a few days in a row. Consistency helps kids feel secure—and your sanity matters more than variety.

Chocolate Zucchini Bread

Rich like cake, but technically still a vegetable loaf! This is the best way I know to use up garden zucchini—and no one complains when this comes out of the oven.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup oil
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 1/2 cups grated zucchini (squeeze dry if very wet)
- 1 cup flour
- 1/2 cup cocoa powder
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- 1/2 cup chocolate chips

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a loaf pan.
2. In a large bowl, mix oil, sugars, eggs, and vanilla. Stir in zucchini.
3. In another bowl, whisk flour, cocoa, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon.
4. Add dry ingredients to wet, stir until just combined. Fold in chocolate chips.
5. Pour into loaf pan and bake 50–60 minutes until toothpick comes out mostly clean.
6. Cool before slicing. Enjoy warm or chilled—both are lovely.

Baked Spinach Bites

These are a cheesy little snack packed with flavor—and veggies! They're great warm or cold, and you can even pack them in lunches.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup breadcrumbs
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp onion powder
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment or lightly grease it.
2. In a bowl, mix all ingredients until well combined.
3. Scoop into small balls (a cookie scoop works well) and place on baking sheet.
4. Bake 15–18 minutes or until set and lightly golden. Serve warm or chilled.

Cheesy Garlic Breadsticks

Soft, fluffy breadsticks loaded with butter, garlic, and melty cheese—what more could you ask for? We eat these with soup, pasta, or on their own with dipping sauce.

Ingredients:

- 1 batch homemade pizza or breadstick dough
- 1/4 cup butter, melted
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella or Italian blend cheese
- 2 tbsp grated Parmesan
- Parsley or Italian seasoning (optional)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet.
2. Roll dough into a rectangle (about 9x13"). Transfer to the pan.
3. Mix butter and garlic powder, then brush generously over dough.
4. Sprinkle with cheeses and herbs.
5. Bake for 12–15 minutes until golden and bubbly.
6. Slice into strips and serve with warm marinara or ranch for dipping

Slow Snack Moment:

Once in a while, turn snack time into connection time. Sit down, pour something warm, and just enjoy a few quiet bites together. It can become a sweet rhythm in your day.

No-Bake Snacks & Treats

Sweet Treats Without Heating the Oven

Some days are just too warm, too busy, or too full to bake—and that's when no-bake recipes come to the rescue. These are the recipes we stir together in one bowl, press into pans, or scoop into little bites. They're quick, simple, and always loved.

Whether it's a fudgy square, a creamy bar, or a bite of something chewy and sweet, no-bake snacks are a must-have in a busy kitchen. They're great for summer days, last-minute desserts, or those "*just need something*" moments in the afternoon.

Double Chocolate Crumble (No-Bake Bars)

Rich, chewy, and chocolatey with just the right amount of crunch. These bars taste like a cross between fudge and a granola bar—no oven required!

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup butter
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup cocoa powder
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 2 1/2 cups quick oats
- 1/2 cup mini chocolate chips
- Pinch of salt

Directions:

1. In a saucepan, melt butter, brown sugar, cocoa, and milk over medium heat. Bring to a gentle boil and cook 1 minute.
 2. Remove from heat. Stir in vanilla and oats. Let cool a couple minutes.
 3. Fold in chocolate chips (they'll melt slightly for a fudgy swirl).
 4. Press mixture into a greased 8x8-inch pan. Chill for 1–2 hours or until firm.
 5. Cut into squares and store in the fridge.
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Coconut Chocolate Haystacks

Just three ingredients—and no one ever guesses how easy they are!

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cups shredded sweetened coconut
- 1 1/2 cups chocolate chips
- 1 tbsp coconut oil or shortening

Directions:

1. Melt chocolate chips with coconut oil until smooth.
 2. Stir in coconut until coated.
 3. Drop spoonfuls onto parchment paper.
 4. Chill until set. Store in fridge.
-

Homemade Chocolate Pudding

This pudding is smooth, rich, and so much better than the boxed kind. We like it warm on cold days or chilled with whipped cream on top.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/3 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1/4 cup cornstarch
- 1/8 tsp salt
- 2 3/4 cups milk
- 2 tbsp butter
- 1 tsp vanilla

Directions:

1. In a saucepan, whisk sugar, cocoa, cornstarch, and salt. Slowly whisk in milk.
 2. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until mixture thickens and bubbles. (This takes 5–8 minutes—don't stop stirring!)
 3. Remove from heat. Stir in butter and vanilla.
 4. Pour into serving bowls. Serve warm or cover and chill for later. Add whipped cream if you'd like!
-

Peanut Butter Rice Krispie Balls

These are easy, freezer-friendly, and always disappear fast.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1/2 cup honey or corn syrup
- 3 cups crispy rice cereal
- Optional: mini chocolate chips or chopped peanuts

Directions:

1. In a saucepan, warm peanut butter and honey until smooth.
2. Remove from heat and stir in cereal. Add optional mix-ins.
3. Let cool slightly, then roll into 1-inch balls.
4. Chill on a tray, then store in fridge or freezer.



No-Bake Cheesecake Cups (Layered in Jars or Bowls)

These little cups taste like a slice of creamy cheesecake without turning on the oven. They're perfect for showers, birthdays, or just when you need something pretty and sweet.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup graham cracker crumbs
- 3 tbsp butter, melted
- 2 tbsp sugar

Filling:

- 8 oz cream cheese, softened
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 cup whipped topping (or whipped cream)

Toppings (optional):

- Pie filling, fresh berries, lemon curd, or chocolate chips

Directions:

1. Mix graham crumbs, sugar, and melted butter. Press into the bottom of small jars or dessert cups.
 2. In a bowl, beat cream cheese, powdered sugar, and vanilla until smooth. Fold in whipped topping.
 3. Spoon filling over crust. Add your favorite topping.
 4. Chill for at least 2 hours before serving.
-

No-Bake Cookie Dough Bites (Egg-Free!)

Safe to eat and perfect for kids to help with—these little bites taste just like cookie dough.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 cup flour (heat-treated*)
- 1–2 tbsp milk
- 1/2 cup mini chocolate chips

*To heat-treat flour: Microwave for 1 minute or bake at 350°F for 5 minutes, then cool.

Directions:

1. Cream butter and sugar. Mix in vanilla and flour.
2. Add milk until soft dough forms. Fold in chocolate chips.
3. Roll into small balls and refrigerate until firm.

Homemade Fudge Squares (Peanut Butter or Chocolate)

This is a pantry classic. You can change the flavor depending on what chips or nut butters you have!

Base Recipe:

- 2 cups chocolate or peanut butter chips
- 1 can (14 oz) sweetened condensed milk
- 1 tsp vanilla

Optional Add-ins:

- Chopped nuts, marshmallows, or crushed cookies

Directions:

1. Melt chips and sweetened condensed milk together until smooth.
2. Stir in vanilla and any mix-ins.
3. Pour into a greased or lined 8x8 pan. Chill until firm. Cut into squares and store in the fridge.

 **Cereal Snack Mix Clusters**

Perfect for parties, holidays, or afternoon crunch. These are sweet, salty, and highly snackable.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups Chex or Crispix cereal
- 1 cup pretzel pieces
- 1 cup mini marshmallows
- 1 cup peanuts or chopped nuts (optional)
- 1 bag white chocolate chips or almond bark
- Sprinkles (optional)

Directions:

1. Mix cereal, pretzels, and marshmallows in a large bowl.
2. Melt white chocolate or almond bark until smooth.
3. Pour over mixture and stir to coat.
4. Drop clusters onto parchment paper. Add sprinkles if desired.
5. Let set, then store in an airtight container.

 **Graham Cracker Icebox Cake**

This one's a summer favorite. It softens into a layered dessert that tastes like something fancy, but it's just graham crackers, pudding, and whipped topping.

Ingredients:

- 1 box graham crackers
- 2 small boxes instant pudding (vanilla or chocolate)
- 3 cups cold milk
- 1 tub whipped topping (or homemade)
- Optional: sliced bananas or strawberries

Directions:

1. Whisk pudding and milk together. Let thicken for 5 minutes.
2. In a 9x13 dish, lay down a layer of graham crackers.
3. Spread half the pudding, then a layer of whipped topping.
4. Repeat layers, ending with whipped topping.
5. Cover and chill at least 6 hours or overnight. Crackers soften into cake-like layers.

Dips & Spreads **For Fruit, Veggies, Crackers & Gathering Plates**

There's something about a good dip that just brings folks to the table—whether it's a platter of crisp veggies after church, fruit and dip for a snacky lunch, or a bowl of spread beside a basket of crackers. Dips are the kind of thing that make a regular moment feel a little more special. Most of these recipes can be stirred together in minutes with ingredients you likely already have on hand. They're great for kids to dip into, and perfect for company, too.

Creamy Fruit Dip

Sweet and fluffy, this is perfect with apples, grapes, strawberries, or graham crackers.

Ingredients:

- 8 oz cream cheese, softened
- 1/2 cup brown sugar or powdered sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla
- Optional: 2 tbsp marshmallow fluff or whipped topping

Directions:

1. Beat cream cheese, sugar, and vanilla until smooth.
 2. Stir in fluff or whipped topping if using.
 3. Chill before serving. Keeps well in the fridge for a few days.
-

Classic Veggie Dip

Simple, creamy, and full of flavor—this one shows up at every family gathering with a tray of carrots, celery, and broccoli.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1 tbsp dried parsley
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp dill
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Mix everything together in a bowl.
2. Let sit for at least 30 minutes in the fridge to let the flavors blend.
3. Serve with fresh veggies or chips.

Cheddar Ranch Cracker Spread

This one is thick enough to spread or scoop—great with crackers, pretzels, or spread onto wraps.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup mayo
- 2 tbsp dry ranch dressing mix
- Optional: green onions, chopped finely

Directions:

1. Stir together all ingredients until creamy.
 2. Chill for at least 1 hour.
 3. Serve with crackers, pita chips, or cucumber rounds.
-

Sweet Cream Cheese Fruit Spread (Great with Bagels or Crackers)

This one feels fancy but takes just a few minutes. You can use jam, jelly, or fruit puree—whatever's in the pantry.

Ingredients:

- 8 oz cream cheese, softened
- 2 tbsp powdered sugar
- 3 tbsp fruit preserves or puree (strawberry, mango, or apricot work well)

Directions:

1. Beat all ingredients until smooth.
 2. Chill and serve with bagel chips, apple slices, or graham crackers.
-

Peanut Butter Yogurt Dip

This one's high-protein and loved by kids—it's great with apples, bananas, pretzels, or even spread onto pancakes.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup plain or vanilla Greek yogurt
- 1/3 cup peanut butter
- 1–2 tbsp honey or maple syrup
- Dash of cinnamon (optional)

Directions:

1. Stir all ingredients together until creamy.
 2. Serve immediately or chill for later.
-

Baked Cream Cheese & Chipped Beef Dip

This old-fashioned favorite is savory, salty, and so comforting. It's best served warm with buttery crackers.

Ingredients:

- 8 oz cream cheese, softened
- 1/4 cup sour cream
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp onion powder
- 1 jar dried beef, chopped finely
- 2 green onions, chopped
- Optional: sprinkle of shredded cheddar on top

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
 2. Mix cream cheese, sour cream, garlic powder, and onion powder until smooth.
 3. Fold in chipped beef and green onions.
 4. Spread into a small greased baking dish. Top with cheddar if desired.
 5. Bake 20–25 minutes until bubbly and golden. Serve warm with crackers or baguette slices.
-

Cheesy Bacon Ranch Dip (Cold or Warm)

This one's easy to make ahead and can be served cold—or baked until bubbly. Either way, it's always a favorite.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup mayo
- 1/4 cup cooked, crumbled bacon
- 2 tbsp dry ranch dressing mix

Directions:

1. Mix everything in a bowl.
2. Chill for at least an hour for cold dip.
3. **Optional:** To serve warm, spread into a baking dish and bake at 350°F for 20 minutes.

Baked Spinach & Cheese Dip

Warm, creamy, and a great way to use up leftover spinach. I've served this with tortilla chips, pita bread, and even warmed mini naan.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
- 8 oz cream cheese
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella or Italian blend
- 1/4 cup Parmesan
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
 2. Mix all ingredients in a bowl until combined.
 3. Spread into a greased baking dish.
 4. Bake for 20–25 minutes until hot and golden on top.
-

Tomato & Herb Cream Cheese Spread

A chilled, savory spread that tastes like a fresh tomato garden in a bowl. Lovely with crackers, pretzels, or veggie sticks.

Ingredients:

- 8 oz cream cheese, softened
- 2 tbsp tomato paste or sundried tomato spread
- 1/4 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp dried basil
- Dash of salt and pepper

Directions:

1. Beat everything together until smooth.
2. Chill for 30 minutes.
3. Serve with crackers or as a spread for sandwiches and wraps.

From-Scratch Staples

Homemade Treats, Mixes & Snack-Time Basics

There's something so satisfying about making it yourself. Maybe it's the way the kitchen smells, or knowing exactly what's in your food—but homemade versions of store-bought favorites just feel a little cozier. These are the basics we like to keep on hand: snacks, sauces, crackers, and pickles. They're simple enough to make with the kids and give you a sense of old-fashioned independence. Sometimes I'll spend an afternoon making a few of these ahead so the week feels smoother—and it's one less thing to buy at the store.

Homemade Chocolate Syrup

Perfect for milk, drizzling over pancakes or ice cream, or even mixing into coffee.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup cocoa powder
- 3 cups sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 2 cups water
- 1 tbsp vanilla extract

Directions:

1. In a saucepan, whisk cocoa, sugar, salt, and water until smooth.
 2. Bring to a boil, then simmer gently until mixture reaches 220°F on a thermometer (about 5–7 minutes).
 3. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla.
 4. Let cool, then store in a jar in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.
-

Easy Refrigerator Pickles

Crisp, tangy, and just right for sandwiches or snacking. No canning needed.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups water
- 2 cups vinegar (white or apple cider)
- 2 tbsp salt
- 1 tsp sugar
- Fresh or freeze-dried dill
- Garlic cloves (optional)
- Sliced cucumbers

Directions:

1. In a saucepan, warm water, vinegar, salt, and sugar until salt dissolves. Let cool.
 2. Pack sliced cucumbers into jars with dill and garlic if using.
 3. Pour brine over to cover.
 4. Seal and refrigerate. Let sit 24–48 hours before eating. Keeps for 1–2 weeks.
-

Homemade Animal Crackers

A sweet, simple snack that tastes just like childhood.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp salt

Directions:

1. Cream butter and sugar. Add egg and vanilla.
 2. Mix in flour, baking powder, and salt.
 3. Chill dough for 30 minutes, then roll out 1/4" thick.
 4. Cut with small cookie cutters.
 5. Bake at 350°F for 8–10 minutes until lightly golden. Cool completely.
-

Homemade Graham Crackers

Sweet and hearty with a touch of honey. Great for snacking or s'mores.

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 cup butter, cold and cubed
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1 tsp vanilla

Directions:

1. Mix flours, sugar, baking soda, and salt. Cut in butter until crumbly.
2. Stir in honey, milk, and vanilla to form dough.
3. Roll out 1/8" thick between parchment paper.
4. Cut into rectangles or shapes.
5. Bake at 350°F for 10–12 minutes. Cool and store in an airtight tin.

Homemade Butter Crackers

These buttery, crisp crackers are perfect with cheese or dips—and you'll never go back to boxed!

Ingredients:

- 1 cup flour
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 2 tbsp cold butter
- 1/4 cup water (more if needed)

Directions:

1. Mix flour and salt. Cut in butter until crumbly.
 2. Add water gradually to form a dough.
 3. Roll out very thin. Cut into squares or circles.
 4. Prick with a fork and place on a greased baking sheet.
 5. Bake at 400°F for 8–10 minutes or until golden.
-

Homemade Cheesy Snack Crackers (Like Cheez-Its)

These are crisp, cheesy, and downright fun to make. Cut them into little squares with a butter knife and poke the centers with a toothpick to get that classic look.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 4 tbsp cold butter, cubed
- 8 oz sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 2–3 tbsp cold water

Directions:

1. In a food processor (or by hand), pulse flour, salt, and butter until crumbly.
2. Add shredded cheese and pulse again.
3. Slowly add cold water, 1 tbsp at a time, until dough forms.
4. Divide dough in half. Roll out each half very thin (about 1/8") between parchment paper.
5. Cut into small squares with a knife or pizza cutter. Poke the center of each with a toothpick.
6. Bake on a parchment-lined baking sheet at 350°F for 12–15 minutes, or until crisp and golden. Cool completely.

Homemade Fruit Leather (Rolled on Parchment)

Soft, chewy, and sweet without anything artificial. Kids love these, and they travel well. Just roll them up in parchment and tie with twine.

Ingredients:

- 3 cups chopped fruit (strawberries, peaches, applesauce, or mixed berries)
- 2–3 tbsp honey or maple syrup (to taste)
- 1 tsp lemon juice

Directions:

1. In a blender, purée the fruit with honey and lemon juice until smooth.
 2. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper.
 3. Pour mixture onto paper and spread evenly, about 1/8" thick.
 4. Dry in a 170°F oven (or lowest setting) for 5–7 hours, or until no longer sticky to the touch.
 5. Let cool. Cut into strips with parchment attached, roll up, and store in an airtight container.
-

Homemade Oven-Dried Apple Chips

Thin, crisp, and a great alternative to store-bought chips. You don't need a dehydrator—just time and patience.

Ingredients:

- 2–3 apples, thinly sliced
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon (optional)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 200°F.
2. Core apples (if desired) and slice very thin—use a mandolin if you have one.
3. Arrange slices in a single layer on a parchment-lined baking sheet.
4. Sprinkle lightly with cinnamon if using.
5. Bake for 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 hours, flipping once halfway, until dry and crisp.
6. Let cool and store in a jar or tin.

Homemade Snack Mix (Better Than Store-Bought!)

This is a flexible recipe—use what you have! The seasoned oil coating makes it extra flavorful and keeps it way cheaper than pre-made mixes.

Base Mix:

- 2 cups oyster crackers
- 2 cups Chex cereal (any kind)
- 1 cup pretzels
- 1 cup homemade or store-brand cheese crackers

Seasoning:

- 1/3 cup oil (vegetable, olive, or melted butter)
- 1 tbsp ranch dressing mix (store-bought or homemade)
- Optional: 1/2 tsp garlic powder, 1/2 tsp onion powder, pinch of cayenne

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 250°F.
2. In a large bowl, combine crackers, cereal, and pretzels.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk together oil and seasonings.
4. Pour over dry mix and stir gently to coat.
5. Spread onto a large baking sheet and bake for 45 minutes, stirring every 15 minutes.
6. Cool completely before storing in an airtight container.

Break the Routine Tip:

If the days are starting to blur together, try adding a little sparkle to the ordinary. A mid-afternoon “tea party” with your kids—using real cups, a little treat, and even just water or lemonade—can feel like a celebration. Or take your snack outside, spread a blanket, and let the sunshine reset everyone’s mood. Small shifts like these can turn a hard day into a sweet memory.



A Note for Tired Moms

If you're reading this section near the end of a long day—maybe dinner's not quite ready, the house is noisy, and your feet are tired—I just want to say, you're doing a good job.

Sometimes snack time feels like the hundredth thing on the list. You've wiped counters, folded laundry, stepped over toys, taught lessons, and probably reheated your coffee three times. And here comes another "*Mom, I'm hungry!*"

You don't have to make a homemade cracker every time. This chapter is full of ideas for when you do have the time—but grace is for the days when you don't. A piece of fruit and a spoonful of peanut butter still counts. A handful of cereal still counts. Sitting together with a plate of something simple still counts.

So here's a list just for you—no recipe needed, no guilt attached.

10 Easy Snacks for When You're Almost Through the Day

1. **Celery sticks with peanut butter** (and raisins if they ask for "ants on a log")
2. **Apple slices with cinnamon or cheese cubes**
3. **Tortilla rolled with lunchmeat or spread with cream cheese**
4. **Graham crackers dipped in milk or nut butter**
5. **Cottage cheese with fruit or a drizzle of honey**
6. **Popcorn with a little melted butter and salt**
7. **Banana with a scoop of peanut butter on a spoon**
8. **Cheese stick and a small handful of pretzels**
9. **Hard-boiled egg and crackers**
10. **A muffin from the freezer, warmed and buttered**

You've made it this far today, and that matters. Snack time isn't just food—it's often a pause. A little break. A moment to sit and be present. And you, dear mom, are the very best ingredient in that moment.

Easy Snacks for Little Ones

Simple, Soft, and Homemade with Love

Little ones don't need fancy snacks—they need food they can hold, chew, and enjoy while they toddle through life. These homemade options are soft, naturally sweet, and easy to make ahead. You don't need anything special—just a few minutes in the kitchen and maybe a freezer bag or two. These are the kind of snacks I've served while babies sat in high chairs banging spoons, or when I needed something quick before a nap or after a bath. They're made from real food, meant to nourish and comfort, and they can be eaten slowly with little fingers or on the go in a bib and a stroller.

Soft Apple Cinnamon Muffins (Mini Size)

Freeze these and thaw a few at a time for easy snacks.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup applesauce
- 1/4 cup oil or melted butter
- 1/4 cup sugar or maple syrup
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 cup flour
- 1/2 tsp baking soda
- Pinch of salt

Directions:

1. Mix all ingredients in a bowl.
 2. Spoon into greased mini muffin tins.
 3. Bake at 350°F for 12–15 minutes or until set and lightly golden.
 4. Cool and freeze in batches.
-

Banana Oat Bites

Soft and chewy with no added sugar—just bananas and oats!

Ingredients:

- 2 ripe bananas
- 1 cup quick oats
- Optional: a few mini chocolate chips or cinnamon

Directions:

1. Mash bananas and stir in oats and any add-ins.
2. Drop by spoonfuls onto a greased or lined baking sheet.
3. Flatten slightly.
4. Bake at 350°F for 10–12 minutes. Cool completely.

Mini Cheese Crackers

Soft, crumbly, and great for early chewers.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup shredded cheddar
- 1/2 cup flour
- 2 tbsp butter
- 1–2 tbsp water

Directions:

1. Pulse all ingredients in a food processor until dough forms.
 2. Roll out and cut into small shapes or squares.
 3. Bake at 350°F for 10–12 minutes or until lightly golden. Cool and store in a tin.
-

Hidden Veggie Smoothie Pops

A great way to sneak in veggies and hydrate little ones on warm days.

Ingredients:

- 1 banana
- 1/2 cup frozen strawberries
- 1/4 cup cooked, cooled carrot or sweet potato
- 1/2 cup yogurt or milk
- Dash of cinnamon or vanilla

Directions:

1. Blend until smooth.
 2. Pour into mini silicone molds or ice cube trays.
 3. Freeze and serve as mini pops or frozen bites.
-

Zwieback Toast (Homemade Teething Toast)

Perfect for teething babies. This is soft-baked bread, dried into crisp toast they can gum safely.

Directions:

1. Cut thick slices of homemade bread into finger-sized pieces.
 2. Toast lightly or bake at 300°F until dried out.
 3. Let cool and store in a tin or jar. Great with a little applesauce or just on their own.
-

Frozen Treats & Popsicles

Cool Snacks for Hot Days & Happy Faces

Sometimes the best snack is the one that cools you down and makes the kids squeal with excitement. These frozen treats aren't just fun—they're easy to make, simple to store, and healthier (or thriftier) than boxed popsicles or ice cream bars.

Keep a shelf in your freezer full of these little goodies and you'll always have something ready when the sun is hot or the day feels long. No fancy molds required—just what you already have in the kitchen, and a little imagination.

Dippin' Dots Yogurt Treats

Just flavored yogurt piped into tiny dots and frozen—they feel like ice cream candy!

How-To:

- Spoon any flavored yogurt into a sandwich bag.
 - Snip the corner and pipe tiny dots onto a parchment-lined tray.
 - Freeze for 1–2 hours, then store in a container or bag.
-

Frozen Banana Bites

Sweet, creamy, and just right when you want a treat without baking.

How-To:

- Slice bananas into rounds.
 - Spread a bit of peanut butter or Nutella on one round and sandwich with another.
 - Freeze on a tray.
 - Optional: dip in melted chocolate and freeze again.
-

Pudding Graham Freezer Sandwiches

Like a frozen s'more—but easier!

How-To:

- Spread chocolate pudding between two graham cracker squares.
 - Wrap in plastic wrap and freeze until firm.
 - Eat straight from the freezer like an ice cream sandwich.
-

Homemade Popsicles (3 Ways)

Pour into molds, cups, or ice cube trays with sticks.

1. **Creamy Berry Pops:** Blend yogurt, strawberries, and honey.
2. **Orange Creamsicle:** Mix orange juice and vanilla yogurt.
3. **Choco-Banana Pop:** Blend banana, cocoa powder, and a splash of milk.

Freeze: 4–6 hours or overnight.

Applesauce Ice Pops

Easy and baby/toddler friendly.

How-To:

- Spoon unsweetened applesauce into popsicle molds or mini paper cups.
 - Freeze with a craft stick stuck in the center.
 - Optional: add cinnamon or a swirl of jam before freezing.
-

Frozen Yogurt Bark

Fun to make with kids and perfect for quick snacks.

How-To:

- Spread yogurt onto a parchment-lined tray about 1/4" thick.
 - Sprinkle with berries, chopped fruit, mini chocolate chips, or granola.
 - Freeze until firm, then break into pieces and store in a bag.
-

Juice Box Pops

Don't forget this super-easy one!

How-To:

- Just toss full juice boxes (no straws inserted) into the freezer.
 - Let them thaw slightly before snipping off the top for a built-in frozen slushie.
-



Frozen Applesauce or Pudding Cubes

Scoop into silicone molds or ice cube trays.

How-To:

- Fill each cube with chocolate pudding, yogurt, or applesauce.
 - Freeze and pop out to serve on hot days or in mesh feeders for teething babies.
-

Smoothie Freezer Cups

Leftover smoothies? Pour them into little cups with a spoon and freeze.

Tip: Great for repurposing extra smoothie from breakfast.

A Little Coffee and a Word to You, Mama

If we were sitting together right now, maybe at the corner of your kitchen table or on the porch while the kids played, I'd pour us both a cup of something warm and say this:

You're doing a good job.

You've packed lunches, wiped faces, passed out apple slices and muffins and crackers, and maybe—just maybe—you forgot to feed yourself somewhere in the middle of it all.

Snack time isn't just about filling little tummies. It's about those in-between moments that say, "I see you. I care for you. Let's pause for a minute." And mama, you deserve that moment too.

So before we turn the page to dinner and busy evenings, here's a quiet little bonus chapter just for you...

Bonus: A Few Treats Just for Mom Because You Matter, Too

You don't need much—just a drawer or shelf with a few favorites tucked away for those times you need to press pause. These aren't fancy, just little bits of comfort you can pull out when no one's looking (or even when they are).

Freezer Chocolate Bark (with a Hint of Sea Salt)

Melt 1 1/2 cups chocolate chips with 1 tsp coconut oil. Spread on parchment, top with a sprinkle of sea salt and chopped almonds or pretzels. Freeze until firm. Break into pieces and stash in a bag for emergencies (the good kind).

Coffee Cube Creamers

Freeze leftover coffee mixed with a little cream and vanilla in an ice cube tray. Pop one into your hot cup later—it'll cool it just enough and make it taste like a café drink.

"Mom Pops" – Fruit & Tea Blend

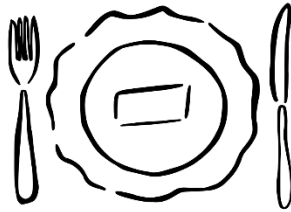
Brew a strong herbal tea (peach or raspberry works great), mix with pureed fruit (like mango or pineapple), and freeze into popsicle molds. It feels refreshing and just fancy enough to feel like a treat.

You matter just as much as the ones you serve. Don't forget to feed your own soul, too—even if it's just one chocolate square at a time.

Chapter 4: Dinner at Our Table

Dinner is the anchor of our day. No matter how scattered the hours before it may have been—school books out, laundry half-folded, shoes by the door—when dinner comes, we gather. It’s less about what’s on the table and more about the hands that made it and the people sitting around it. Most nights, our dinners are simple. Nothing fancy. But they’re warm, filling, and made with love—and most of the time, from ingredients I already had in the pantry. Whether it’s a pot of spaghetti, baked chicken and potatoes, or a skillet full of leftovers turned into something new, dinner is where we come back together.

This chapter holds the recipes that feed a family: practical, affordable, homemade meals with heart. I’ve sorted them by the kinds of dinners most of us reach for—ground beef, chicken, pasta, rice, and more. They’re written for busy evenings, real budgets, and hungry bellies.



Dinner Staples to Keep on Hand

These are the basics I like to keep stocked to make dinner come together without too much fuss:

Fridge & Freezer:

- Ground beef and chicken (thighs, breasts, or tenders)
- Shredded cheese (cheddar, mozzarella, Parmesan)
- Butter, sour cream, cream cheese
- Frozen vegetables (corn, peas, broccoli, mixed)
- Tortillas
- Frozen potatoes (hash browns, fries, or diced)

Pantry:

- Pasta (elbow, spaghetti, penne, egg noodles)
- Rice (white, brown, or jasmine)
- Canned beans (black, pinto, kidney)
- Canned tomatoes (diced, crushed, sauce, paste)
- Canned cream soups (or your homemade version)
- Onions, garlic
- Tomato paste, ketchup
- Chicken and beef bouillon or broth
- Flour, oil, cornstarch
- Basic spices: salt, pepper, garlic powder, onion powder, Italian seasoning, paprika, chili powder

Dinner Doesn't Have to Be Perfect:

What matters most isn't the menu—it's the togetherness. Even a simple meal served with peace can nourish more than just the body.

10 Ground Beef Meals

Simple, Filling, and Always a Family Favorite

Ground beef is one of the most versatile ingredients in a homemaker's kitchen. It cooks up quickly, stretches easily, and pairs well with pasta, potatoes, rice, and just about anything else you've got on hand. These are the meals that show up again and again at our table—not because they're fancy, but because they work. You'll find casseroles, skillet dinners, and cozy bakes here, all made from pantry staples and written to feed hungry people well.

Sloppy Joe Bake

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1/2 onion, diced
- 1/2 green pepper, diced (optional)
- 1 cup ketchup
- 1 tbsp mustard
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 can refrigerated biscuit dough or homemade biscuit dough
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. In a skillet, cook ground beef, onion, and green pepper until beef is browned. Drain excess grease.
3. Stir in ketchup, mustard, brown sugar, garlic powder, salt, and pepper. Simmer for 5 minutes.
4. Pour into a greased 9x13 pan. Top with biscuits and sprinkle with cheese.
5. Bake for 20–25 minutes until biscuits are golden and cooked through.

Classic Meatloaf

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 lbs ground beef
- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 cup oats or breadcrumbs
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp pepper
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp onion powder
- 1/2 cup ketchup (plus extra for topping)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
 2. Mix all ingredients in a large bowl.
 3. Shape into a loaf and place in a greased loaf pan or on a baking sheet.
 4. Spread extra ketchup on top.
 5. Bake for 50–60 minutes until cooked through. Let rest 10 minutes before slicing.
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Hamburger Gravy Over Mashed Potatoes

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 2 tbsp butter
- 2 tbsp flour
- 2 cups milk
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Mashed potatoes for serving

Directions:

1. Brown ground beef in a skillet; drain excess grease.
2. Push meat to one side and melt butter in the empty side of the pan. Stir in flour and cook 1–2 minutes.
3. Slowly whisk in milk and stir everything together. Simmer until thickened.
4. Season with salt and pepper.
5. Serve over mashed potatoes.

Beef and Bean Burritos

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 packet taco seasoning or homemade equivalent
- 1 can refried beans
- 1 cup shredded cheese
- 8–10 tortillas

Directions:

1. Cook ground beef and drain. Stir in taco seasoning and 1/4 cup water.
 2. Warm refried beans and stir in with beef.
 3. Fill tortillas with mixture and cheese.
 4. Roll into burritos. Serve warm or wrap in foil and freeze for later.
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Goulash (American-Style)

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 cups elbow macaroni
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 1 can tomato sauce
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 cup shredded cheese (optional)

Directions:

1. Cook macaroni and set aside.
 2. In a large pot, cook ground beef and onion until browned. Drain.
 3. Add tomatoes, sauce, seasonings, and drained macaroni. Stir and heat through.
 4. Stir in cheese if desired. Serve warm.
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Tater Tot Casserole

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 cup shredded cheese
- 1 bag frozen tater tots
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
 2. Brown ground beef and drain.
 3. Stir in soup, milk, salt, and pepper. Spread into greased 9x13 dish.
 4. Sprinkle with cheese and top with tater tots.
 5. Bake for 30–35 minutes or until tots are golden and casserole is bubbly.
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Taco Skillet

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 packet taco seasoning
- 1/2 cup salsa
- 1 can black beans, drained
- 1 cup corn (frozen or canned)
- 1 cup shredded cheese

Directions:

1. Brown beef in a skillet and drain.
 2. Stir in seasoning, salsa, beans, and corn. Simmer 5–7 minutes.
 3. Top with cheese, cover, and let melt.
 4. Serve with tortilla chips or over rice.
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Cheeseburger Macaroni (Homemade Hamburger Helper)

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 2 cups elbow noodles
- 2 cups beef broth
- 1 cup milk
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 cup shredded cheddar

Directions:

1. Brown beef in a large skillet. Drain.
 2. Add noodles, broth, milk, and seasonings. Stir and bring to a boil.
 3. Cover and simmer 12–15 minutes or until pasta is tender.
 4. Stir in cheese and serve.
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Stuffed Peppers (or Lazy Pepper Bake)

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 cup cooked rice
- 1/2 onion, diced
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning
- 4–6 bell peppers (or just chop and mix in for lazy version)
- 1 cup shredded cheese

Directions:

1. Brown beef with onion. Drain and mix with rice, tomatoes, and seasoning.
 2. Stuff halved peppers or mix chopped peppers into filling and place in baking dish.
 3. Top with cheese and bake at 375°F for 25–30 minutes until bubbly.
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Shepherd's Pie (with Ground Beef)

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1/2 onion, diced
- 1 can mixed vegetables (or 1 1/2 cups frozen)
- 1 tbsp flour
- 1 cup beef broth
- 3–4 cups mashed potatoes
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
 2. Cook beef and onion until browned. Stir in flour and cook 1 minute.
 3. Add broth and vegetables; simmer until thickened.
 4. Pour into baking dish and spread mashed potatoes on top.
 5. Bake 25–30 minutes until golden and bubbly.
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Meatloaf- if your children don't usually like it-try this

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs ground beef
- 1 egg
- ¾ cup plain breadcrumbs
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp onion powder (or 2 tbsp finely diced onion)
- 1 tbsp dried parsley
- 1 cup tomato sauce (plus extra for topping, if you like)

Directions:

Preheat your oven to 350°F. In a large bowl, combine all the ingredients and mix gently—just until combined, not overmixed.

Form the mixture into a loaf shape and place it in a greased loaf pan or on a parchment-lined baking sheet. If you like a saucy top, spread a few spoonfuls of tomato sauce over the loaf before baking.

Bake for 50–60 minutes, or until cooked through and the top is nicely browned. Let it rest a few minutes before slicing.

Tip: Leftovers make great meatloaf sandwiches the next day

Chicken Meals

Baked, Skillet, or Shredded—It Always Feeds Well

Chicken is one of those faithful ingredients that always finds a way to stretch. Whether you're using thighs, breasts, tenders, or even a rotisserie chicken, it's the base for so many comforting meals. In our home, we bake it, shred it, pan-fry it, or toss it into the slow cooker—and somehow, it always works out.

These recipes are written with real life in mind: a mix of creamy bakes, skillet favorites, and family-style dinners that don't need anything fancy to taste like home.

Baked Ranch Chicken Thighs

Ingredients:

- 4–6 bone-in or boneless chicken thighs
- 1/4 cup oil or melted butter
- 2 tbsp dry ranch seasoning mix
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
 2. Place chicken in a baking dish.
 3. Drizzle with oil and sprinkle with ranch mix, salt, and pepper.
 4. Bake for 35–45 minutes, or until golden and cooked through.
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Chicken and Rice Casserole

Ingredients:

- 1 cup uncooked white rice
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1/2 cup milk
- 4 chicken breasts or thighs
- Salt, pepper, and garlic powder to taste

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
 2. Mix rice, broth, soup, and milk in a greased 9x13 dish.
 3. Lay chicken on top and season.
 4. Cover with foil and bake 60–75 minutes, until rice is tender.
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Creamy Chicken & Stuffing Bake

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 1 box stuffing mix (or homemade)
- 1 can cream of mushroom or chicken soup
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup chicken broth

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
 2. Spread chicken in greased 9x13 pan.
 3. Mix soup, sour cream, and broth; spread over chicken.
 4. Prepare stuffing and spoon over the top.
 5. Bake 30–35 minutes until bubbly.
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BBQ Shredded Chicken Sandwiches

Ingredients:

- 2–3 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 1 cup BBQ sauce
- Buns for serving
- Optional: coleslaw for topping

Directions:

1. Heat chicken and BBQ sauce in a pan or slow cooker.
 2. Spoon onto buns and top with coleslaw if desired.
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Chicken and Broccoli Alfredo Bake

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked pasta
- 2 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 1 1/2 cups steamed broccoli
- 1 jar Alfredo sauce (or homemade)
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella

Directions:

1. Mix all ingredients in a large bowl.
 2. Spread into greased baking dish.
 3. Bake at 375°F for 25–30 minutes until bubbly.
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Crispy Oven Chicken Strips

Ingredients:

- 2 chicken breasts, cut into strips
- 1 cup flour
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 cup breadcrumbs or crushed crackers
- Salt, pepper, and paprika

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
 2. Dredge chicken in flour, then egg, then crumbs.
 3. Place on greased baking sheet.
 4. Bake 20–25 minutes, flipping once, until golden and cooked through.
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Chicken Pot Pie with Biscuits

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1 cup frozen mixed veggies
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 can biscuits or homemade dough

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
 2. Mix chicken, soup, veggies, and milk. Pour into greased dish.
 3. Top with biscuits and bake for 25–30 minutes until golden.
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Garlic Butter Baked Chicken

Ingredients:

- 4 chicken breasts or thighs
- 1/4 cup melted butter
- 2 tsp garlic powder
- Salt, pepper, and parsley

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
 2. Place chicken in a baking dish.
 3. Mix butter and garlic; pour over chicken.
 4. Season and bake 30–40 minutes.
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Chicken Quesadillas

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 1 cup shredded cheese
- 1/2 cup salsa or diced tomatoes
- Tortillas

Directions:

1. Heat skillet over medium heat.
 2. Place filling on half of tortilla, fold, and cook until golden on both sides.
 3. Slice and serve with sour cream.
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Slow Cooker Chicken Tacos

Ingredients:

- 2–3 chicken breasts
- 1 packet taco seasoning
- 1/2 cup water or broth

Directions:

1. Place chicken, seasoning, and water in slow cooker.
2. Cook on low 6–8 hours or high 3–4 hours.
3. Shred and serve in tortillas with toppings.



Pasta & Rice Dishes

Comforting, Budget-Friendly, and Always a Crowd-Pleaser

There's something deeply comforting about a big bowl of pasta or a dish of seasoned rice. These meals come together quickly, use ingredients you probably have on hand, and are easy to double when company comes or appetites are bigger than expected. From creamy casseroles to skillet suppers and one-pot meals, these dinners are all about warmth, ease, and feeding your people well.

Baked Ziti

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ziti or penne pasta
- 1 jar (24 oz) pasta sauce
- 1 cup cottage cheese or ricotta
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella
- 1/2 cup Parmesan (optional)

Directions:

1. Cook pasta and drain.
 2. Mix pasta with sauce and ricotta.
 3. Layer into greased 9x13 dish with mozzarella and Parmesan.
 4. Bake at 375°F for 25–30 minutes until bubbly and golden.
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One-Pot Spaghetti

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef or sausage
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 jar pasta sauce
- 2 1/2 cups water
- 8 oz spaghetti, broken in half

Directions:

1. Brown meat and onion in a large pot. Drain.
 2. Add sauce, water, and spaghetti.
 3. Bring to a boil, then cover and simmer 15–20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until pasta is tender.
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Chicken and Rice Skillet

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked chicken
- 1 cup uncooked rice
- 2 cups broth
- 1 cup frozen peas or mixed veggies
- Salt, pepper, and garlic powder

Directions:

1. In a large skillet, bring rice and broth to a boil.
 2. Cover and simmer 15 minutes.
 3. Stir in chicken and veggies.
 4. Cook another 5–10 minutes until rice is tender and liquid is absorbed.
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Creamy Mac and Cheese

Ingredients:

- 2 cups elbow macaroni
- 2 tbsp butter
- 2 tbsp flour
- 2 cups milk
- 2 cups shredded cheese (cheddar or mix)
- Salt and pepper

Directions:

1. Cook macaroni and drain.
 2. In a saucepan, melt butter, whisk in flour, and cook 1–2 minutes.
 3. Slowly add milk, whisking until thick.
 4. Stir in cheese until melted. Add pasta and stir to coat.
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Cheesy Broccoli Rice Casserole

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked rice
- 1–2 cups steamed broccoli
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 1/2 cups shredded cheese

Directions:

1. Mix everything together and spoon into greased baking dish.
 2. Bake at 350°F for 25–30 minutes until hot and bubbly.
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Homemade Hamburger Helper (Beef Pasta)

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 2 cups beef broth
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 2 cups elbow pasta
- 1 cup shredded cheddar
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- Salt and pepper

Directions:

1. Brown beef in skillet. Drain.
2. Add broth, milk, pasta, and seasoning.
3. Bring to boil, then simmer 12–15 minutes until pasta is cooked.
4. Stir in cheese and serve.

Tuna Noodle Casserole

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked egg noodles
- 1 can tuna, drained
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 cup peas
- 1/2 cup shredded cheese or cracker crumbs for topping

Directions:

1. Mix all ingredients except topping.
 2. Pour into greased dish. Top with cheese or crumbs.
 3. Bake at 375°F for 25–30 minutes.
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Fried Rice with Veggies

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked, cooled rice
- 2 eggs, scrambled
- 1 cup frozen peas & carrots
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tsp sesame oil or regular oil

Directions:

1. In a large skillet, heat oil and stir-fry veggies and rice.
 2. Push to one side and scramble eggs on the other side.
 3. Mix together, add soy sauce, and serve warm.
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Taco Rice Bowls

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 packet taco seasoning
- 2 cups cooked rice
- 1 cup black beans
- Toppings: cheese, salsa, sour cream, lettuce

Directions:

1. Brown beef, drain, and stir in seasoning.
 2. Layer rice, beef, beans, and toppings in bowls.
 3. Serve warm or build your own at the table.
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Chicken Parmesan Pasta Bake

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked pasta
- 2 cups cooked chicken
- 1 jar pasta sauce
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella
- 1/4 cup Parmesan

Directions:

1. Mix pasta, chicken, and sauce.
 2. Pour into baking dish and top with cheeses.
 3. Bake at 375°F for 25 minutes.
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One-Pot & Sheet Pan Meals

Less Dishes, More Comfort

These meals are for the nights when you just want to toss it all in the oven or cook everything in one big skillet and call it done. There's beauty in simplicity, and these recipes bring warm, filling dinners to the table with the least amount of cleanup.

They're great for busy weekdays, after-church Sundays, or just when life is full and the dishwasher's already full, too.

Sheet Pan Sausage and Veggies

Ingredients:

- 1 lb smoked sausage, sliced
- 2 cups chopped potatoes
- 1 cup baby carrots or sliced carrots
- 1 bell pepper, chopped
- 2 tbsp oil
- Salt, pepper, garlic powder

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 425°F.
 2. Toss all ingredients on a sheet pan with oil and seasonings.
 3. Bake for 30–35 minutes, stirring halfway through.
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One-Pot Chili Mac

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 1 can kidney or black beans
- 1 1/2 cups elbow macaroni
- 2 cups beef broth or water
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1 cup shredded cheese

Directions:

1. Brown ground beef in large pot. Drain.
2. Stir in tomatoes, beans, pasta, broth, and seasonings.
3. Bring to a boil, then cover and simmer 12–15 minutes.
4. Stir in cheese and serve.

Chicken, Potato, and Green Bean Sheet Dinner

Ingredients:

- 4 chicken thighs or breasts
- 2 cups diced potatoes
- 2 cups green beans (fresh or frozen)
- 1/4 cup melted butter
- 1 packet ranch dressing mix

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. Place chicken, potatoes, and green beans on sheet pan.
3. Drizzle with butter and sprinkle with ranch mix.
4. Cover with foil and bake for 45 minutes, then uncover and bake 10 more.

Skillet Lasagna

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 jar pasta sauce
- 1 1/2 cups water
- 8 oz lasagna noodles, broken into pieces
- 1 cup ricotta or cottage cheese
- 1 1/2 cups mozzarella

Directions:

1. Brown beef in deep skillet. Drain.
 2. Stir in sauce and water. Add noodles and bring to a simmer.
 3. Cover and cook 15–20 minutes, stirring occasionally.
 4. Drop spoonfuls of ricotta on top and sprinkle with mozzarella. Cover until melted.
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Kielbasa and Cabbage Skillet

Ingredients:

- 1 lb kielbasa or smoked sausage
- 1/2 head cabbage, chopped
- 1/2 onion, sliced
- 2 tbsp butter
- Salt and pepper

Directions:

1. In large skillet, melt butter and sauté onions.
2. Add cabbage and cook until soft.
3. Stir in sliced kielbasa and cook until heated through.

Sheet Pan BBQ Chicken and Corn

Ingredients:

- 4 chicken breasts or thighs
- 1/2 cup BBQ sauce
- 2 cups corn on the cob halves or frozen corn
- 1/2 red onion, sliced

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
 2. Place chicken and veggies on sheet pan.
 3. Brush chicken with BBQ sauce.
 4. Bake 30–40 minutes until cooked through.
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One-Pot Creamy Chicken and Noodles

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked chicken
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups egg noodles
- 1/2 cup cream or milk
- 1 cup frozen peas
- Salt, pepper, garlic powder

Directions:

1. In large pot, bring broth to boil.
 2. Add noodles and cook until almost tender.
 3. Stir in chicken, cream, peas, and seasoning.
 4. Simmer until creamy and thickened.
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Beef and Vegetable Stir-Fry

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef or thin steak slices
- 2 cups frozen stir-fry vegetables
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tsp garlic powder

Directions:

1. Cook beef in skillet until browned.
 2. Add veggies and cook until heated.
 3. Stir in soy sauce, brown sugar, and garlic.
 4. Serve over rice or noodles.
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Sheet Pan Italian Meatballs and Veggies

Ingredients:

- 1 batch homemade or frozen meatballs
- 2 cups diced potatoes
- 1 cup carrots or zucchini
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- Italian seasoning, salt, pepper

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
 2. Toss everything on a sheet pan with oil and seasonings.
 3. Bake 30–35 minutes, turning halfway.
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Ham and Potato Skillet

Ingredients:

- 2 cups diced cooked ham
- 3 cups diced potatoes
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 1 cup shredded cheese (optional)

Directions:

1. Cook potatoes in skillet with oil until tender.
2. Add ham and onion and cook until browned.
3. Top with cheese, cover, and let melt.

Slow It Down Tip:

Try lighting a candle or playing soft music at dinner once in a while. It doesn't make the food taste better, but it does make the moment feel more special.

Soups & Stews **Comfort in a Bowl**

There's nothing like the smell of soup simmering on the stove—it slows the day down. Whether it's a chilly afternoon, a sick day, or just the end of a long week, soups and stews offer comfort, simplicity, and warmth. Most of these recipes start with pantry basics and stretch beautifully when you're feeding a crowd or saving leftovers for tomorrow. Pair them with bread, biscuits, or crackers—and you've got dinner done.

Chicken Noodle Soup

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 1 tbsp butter
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, sliced
- 2 celery stalks, sliced
- 6 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups egg noodles
- Salt, pepper, thyme

Directions:

1. In a large pot, melt butter and sauté onion, carrots, and celery until soft.
 2. Add broth and bring to a boil.
 3. Stir in noodles and cook until tender.
 4. Add chicken and season to taste. Simmer until warmed through.
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Beef Stew

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 lbs stew meat or cubed beef
- 2 tbsp flour
- 1 tbsp oil
- 4 cups beef broth
- 3–4 potatoes, diced
- 2 carrots, sliced
- 1 onion, chopped
- Salt, pepper, thyme, bay leaf

Directions:

1. Toss beef in flour. Brown in oil in a large pot.
 2. Add broth and scrape up browned bits.
 3. Add veggies and seasonings.
 4. Simmer covered for 1–1.5 hours until meat and potatoes are tender.
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Cheesy Potato Soup

Ingredients:

- 4–5 medium potatoes, peeled and diced
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups milk
- 2 cups shredded cheddar
- 1 tbsp butter
- Salt, pepper, parsley

Directions:

1. Boil potatoes and onion in broth until tender.
 2. Mash some of the potatoes for thickness.
 3. Stir in milk, cheese, butter, and seasoning.
 4. Simmer until creamy and hot.
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Chili

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 can kidney beans
- 1 can black beans
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 1 can tomato sauce
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1 tsp cumin
- Salt and pepper

Directions:

1. Brown ground beef in large pot. Drain.
 2. Add remaining ingredients.
 3. Simmer 30–45 minutes, stirring occasionally.
 4. Serve with cheese, sour cream, or cornbread.
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Taco Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 packet taco seasoning
- 1 can corn
- 1 can black beans
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 1 cup water or broth

Directions:

1. Brown beef and stir in taco seasoning.
2. Add all other ingredients.
3. Simmer 20–30 minutes.
4. Serve with tortilla chips, cheese, or sour cream.

Ham and Bean Soup

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked ham, diced
- 1 can great northern or navy beans
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 1–2 carrots, sliced
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 1/2 tsp thyme
- Salt and pepper

Directions:

1. In large pot, sauté onion and carrot.
 2. Add ham, beans, broth, and seasoning.
 3. Simmer 30–40 minutes.
 4. Serve warm with biscuits or cornbread.
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Cabbage Roll Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 1/2 head cabbage, chopped
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 4 cups beef broth
- 1/2 cup uncooked rice
- Salt, pepper, garlic powder

Directions:

1. Brown beef and onion in pot. Drain.
 2. Add cabbage, tomatoes, broth, and rice.
 3. Simmer 45 minutes until rice is tender and cabbage is soft.
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Creamy Broccoli Soup

Ingredients:

- 2 cups chopped broccoli
- 1/2 onion, diced
- 2 tbsp butter
- 2 tbsp flour
- 2 cups milk
- 2 cups broth
- 1 cup shredded cheese

Directions:

1. In pot, melt butter and sauté onion. Stir in flour and cook 1 minute.
 2. Add broth and milk, then broccoli.
 3. Simmer 15–20 minutes until broccoli is soft.
 4. Blend if desired, then stir in cheese.
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Vegetable Beef Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 1 can corn
- 1 can green beans
- 1–2 carrots, sliced
- 4 cups beef broth
- Salt, pepper, garlic powder

Directions:

1. Brown beef and onion. Drain.
 2. Add all remaining ingredients.
 3. Simmer 30–40 minutes.
 4. Serve warm.
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Sausage & Lentil Stew

Ingredients:

- 1 lb sausage (crumbled or sliced)
- 1 cup lentils, rinsed
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 1 carrot, sliced
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 1/2 tsp thyme
- Salt and pepper

Directions:

1. Brown sausage and onion.
2. Add lentils, broth, veggies, and seasoning.
3. Simmer 40–45 minutes until lentils are soft.

Freezer-Friendly Dinners

Make It Now, Eat It Later

Some weeks just get away from us. That's why I love making freezer meals—whether I'm doubling tonight's dinner to save half, or prepping ahead on a quieter afternoon. These meals reheat beautifully, hold up in the freezer, and bless your future self in ways you can't overstate.

If you've got a pan in the freezer and a tired heart at 5 PM, you've already won.

Baked Ziti (Make-Ahead Style)

To Make & Freeze:

Prepare as usual (see Pasta section), but stop before baking. Wrap well and freeze.

To Reheat:

Thaw overnight and bake at 375°F for 25–30 minutes, or bake from frozen (covered) for 60–70 minutes.

Chicken Enchiladas

To Make & Freeze:

Fill tortillas with shredded chicken, cheese, and a little enchilada sauce. Roll and place in pan, top with more sauce and cheese. Wrap and freeze.

To Reheat:

Thaw and bake at 375°F for 25–30 minutes, or bake from frozen with foil for 50–60 minutes.

Lasagna Rolls

To Make & Freeze:

Spread ricotta, sauce, and cooked ground beef on cooked lasagna noodles. Roll, place seam-side down in pan with sauce, top with cheese. Wrap and freeze.

To Reheat:

Thaw and bake at 375°F for 30 minutes until hot and bubbly.

Sloppy Joe Meat Mix

To Make & Freeze:

Cook ground beef with ketchup, mustard, brown sugar, and seasonings. Cool and freeze flat in bags.

To Reheat:

Warm on the stove and serve on buns.

Meatballs (With or Without Sauce)

To Make & Freeze:

Mix and shape meatballs. Bake at 375°F for 20 minutes, then cool and freeze plain or in sauce.

To Reheat:

Simmer in sauce or bake at 350°F until heated through.

Chicken Pot Pie Filling

To Make & Freeze:

Make a creamy chicken and veggie filling with broth, cream, and flour. Cool and freeze in bags or containers.

To Reheat:

Thaw, pour into crust or top with biscuit dough, and bake at 375°F until golden.

Bean & Cheese Burritos

To Make & Freeze:

Fill tortillas with refried beans, cheese, and salsa. Roll and wrap in foil. Freeze in a bag.

To Reheat:

Microwave or bake at 350°F wrapped in foil for 20–25 minutes.

Stuffed Shells

To Make & Freeze:

Stuff cooked pasta shells with ricotta and cheese mix. Place in pan with sauce, top with more cheese. Wrap and freeze.

To Reheat:

Thaw and bake at 375°F for 30–35 minutes.

Creamy Chicken & Rice Bake

To Make & Freeze:

Mix cooked rice, chicken, cream soup, veggies, and cheese. Spread into baking dish, wrap, and freeze.

To Reheat:

Thaw and bake at 375°F for 30–35 minutes, or bake from frozen for about 60 minutes.

Breakfast-for-Dinner Casserole

To Make & Freeze:

Mix cooked sausage or bacon, frozen hash browns, eggs, and shredded cheese. Pour into dish and freeze.

To Reheat:

Thaw overnight and bake at 375°F for 35–40 minutes, or until center is set.

From-Scratch Staples to Cook Healthier at Home **Simple Substitutes for Store-Bought Cans & Packets**

These basics take just a few minutes to make and use ingredients you likely already have. They taste better, cost less, and let you skip the preservatives and additives found in canned versions.

Homemade Cream of Chicken or Mushroom Soup (Can Substitute 1 Can)

Base Recipe:

- 3 tbsp butter
- 3 tbsp flour
- 1 cup milk
- 1/2 cup chicken broth or veggie broth
- Salt, pepper, garlic powder

For Chicken: Add 1/2 cup cooked shredded chicken or chicken bouillon

For Mushroom: Add 1/2 cup finely chopped mushrooms sautéed in butter

Directions:

1. Melt butter in saucepan, whisk in flour and cook 1 minute.
 2. Slowly add liquids, whisking until smooth.
 3. Simmer until thickened. Cool and use immediately or freeze.
-

Homemade Refried Beans (No Can Needed)

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked pinto beans (or 1 can, drained)
- 1–2 tbsp oil or butter
- Salt, garlic powder, onion powder, cumin to taste
- Splash of water or broth

Directions:

1. In skillet, heat oil. Add beans and seasonings.
 2. Mash with a potato masher or fork, adding water as needed.
 3. Simmer until desired texture is reached.
-

Homemade Pizza Sauce

Ingredients:

- 1 small can tomato paste
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning
- Pinch of sugar, salt, and pepper

Directions:

1. Mix all ingredients in a bowl. No cooking required!
 2. Store in fridge for up to a week or freeze in small portions.
-

Taco Seasoning Mix (Replace One Packet)

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp chili powder
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp onion powder
- 1/4 tsp paprika
- Pinch of oregano, salt, and pepper

Directions:

1. Mix together and store in a small jar or bag.
 2. Use for 1 lb ground meat, adding 1/4 cup water while cooking.
-

Homemade Pancake or Biscuit Mix

Ingredients:

- 4 cups flour
- 2 tbsp baking powder
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/4 cup powdered milk (optional)
- 1/4 cup shortening or butter (only if using right away)

Directions:

1. Mix dry ingredients and store in a jar.
 2. Add eggs, milk, and oil when ready to use. Great for quick biscuits, pancakes, or dumplings.
-

Quick Gravy Base

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp butter
- 2 tbsp flour
- 1 cup broth (beef or chicken)
- Salt, pepper

Directions:

1. Melt butter, whisk in flour, and cook 1 minute.
 2. Slowly add broth, whisking until smooth.
 3. Simmer until thick. Add herbs or onions as desired.
-

Homemade Breadcrumbs or Cracker Crumbs

How-To:

- Use stale bread or crackers. Toast or dry in oven, then pulse in food processor.
 - Add garlic powder, parsley, and Parmesan for Italian-style.
 - Store in a jar or freezer.
-

8. DIY Buttermilk Substitute

How-To:

- Mix 1 cup milk with 1 tbsp lemon juice or vinegar. Let sit for 5–10 minutes.
 - Use in baking, marinades, or dressings.
-

A Note for the Busy Mom at Dinnertime

Mama, if no one has told you today—you're doing an incredible job. I know what it's like to hit 5 PM and realize dinner isn't even a thought yet. Maybe the baby didn't nap, the laundry's piled up, and you've been pulled in a dozen directions. This section is for those days when you just need something simple, fast, and filling.

These meals aren't fancy, but they're honest. They'll nourish your people and buy you a little breathing room—and sometimes, that's the biggest win of all. So pour yourself something warm to drink, take a breath, and know it doesn't have to be complicated to be good.

10 Quick & Easy Dinners (Ready in 15–20 Minutes or Less)

- 1. Grilled Cheese and Tomato Soup**
Toast up a pan of grilled cheese sandwiches while a can of tomato soup warms on the stove. Add crackers or carrot sticks and call it dinner.
- 2. Scrambled Eggs and Toast**
Breakfast-for-dinner saves the day. Scramble some eggs, add cheese or veggies if you'd like, and serve with toast, jam, and fruit.
- 3. Quesadillas**
Tortillas with shredded cheese and any leftover meat or beans. Toast on a skillet until golden and slice into wedges.
- 4. Pasta with Butter and Parmesan**
Boil noodles or use leftovers. Toss with butter, Parmesan cheese, and garlic powder. Serve with peas or canned fruit.
- 5. Egg Fried Rice**
Use leftover rice. Scramble in eggs, add frozen peas, soy sauce, and any leftover meat or veggies.
- 6. Tuna or Chicken Salad Sandwiches**
Mix canned tuna or chicken with mayo, relish, salt, and pepper. Serve on bread, rolls, or crackers with sliced apples or veggies.
- 7. Ramen Noodles with Extras**
Boil a pack of ramen noodles. Stir in frozen veggies and scrambled egg or leftover cooked meat. Add soy sauce or sesame oil if you have it.
- 8. Pita or English Muffin Pizzas**
Top each with sauce, cheese, and whatever toppings you have. Toast in the oven until bubbly and hot.

9. **Baked Potato Bar**

Microwave potatoes until soft. Split and top with butter, cheese, sour cream, beans, or leftover taco meat.

10. **Nachos on a Sheet Pan**

Spread tortilla chips on a baking sheet. Add shredded cheese and canned beans or leftover meat. Heat until cheese is melted. Serve with salsa or sour cream.

♥ **Heart Encouragement:**

If dinnertime feels chaotic, remember: feeding your family is an act of love. Even the noisy meals, the picky eaters, and the dishes afterward are part of the ministry of home.

Dinner for Little Ones

Simple meals for the smallest plates at the table

Dinner with toddlers and little ones doesn't have to mean making a second meal. With a few tweaks and gentle flavors, you can offer dinner that fits their needs without doubling your work. Here are some of my go-to dinners for the younger crowd—soft, familiar, and easy to love. These pair well with what the rest of the family is eating, or can stand alone when all else fails.

10 Easy Dinner Ideas for Little Ones

1. **Mini Meatballs with Mashed Potatoes**
Tiny meatballs baked soft and served with a scoop of mashed potatoes and peas. You can even mash it all together if needed.
2. **Creamy Macaroni and Cheese**
A classic for a reason. Soft noodles, gentle cheese flavor, and easy to scoop. Add in finely diced cooked carrots or peas for a veggie boost.
3. **Soft Chicken and Rice**
Shredded or finely diced chicken mixed with buttered rice. Add a splash of broth if needed to keep it soft.
4. **Mini Quesadillas**
Tortilla with melted cheese, sometimes a bit of mild beans or shredded chicken. Cut into strips or triangles.
5. **Baked Sweet Potato Cubes and Scrambled Eggs**
Soft roasted sweet potatoes and a few fluffy eggs make a simple, nourishing plate.
6. **Cheesy Veggie Pasta**
Small pasta shapes (like shells or elbows) with a cheese sauce and finely chopped steamed broccoli or zucchini.
7. **Stuffed Biscuit Cups**
Use biscuit dough and fill with soft meat and cheese, then bake. You can tear into small pieces for little fingers.
8. **Mini Chicken Pot Pie Filling**
Soft chicken, peas, and carrots in creamy sauce. Serve with a biscuit or soft roll to dip.
9. **Homemade Fish Sticks**
Baked with crushed crackers or breadcrumbs, served with soft-cooked carrots or applesauce.
10. **Baked Veggie Patties or Fritters**
Mashed sweet potato, zucchini, or carrot patties baked until soft. Serve with yogurt or ketchup for dipping.

Time Saver Tips

Small steps now for smoother dinners later

Making dinner doesn't always have to start from scratch. A little prep ahead of time—especially on a slower afternoon—can save your sanity on those “what’s for dinner?!” nights. These are the tried-and-true shortcuts that have helped me feed my family with a lot less stress and a lot more peace.

If you've got a few minutes today, you can bless your future self (and your dinner table) tomorrow.

Pre-Cook Ground Beef and Freeze in Bags

Brown a few pounds of hamburger all at once. Drain and cool, then portion into freezer bags or containers. Flatten the bags so they stack easily and defrost faster.

Use For: Tacos, spaghetti, chili, sloppy joes, casseroles, skillet meals.

Grill or Bake Chicken in Bulk

Season and cook boneless chicken breasts or thighs—grill, bake, or even use the crockpot. Once cooked, slice or shred and freeze in meal-size portions.

Use For: Fajitas, stir fry, chicken salad, wraps, soups, quesadillas.

Chop Onions and Peppers and Freeze Flat

Dice onions and peppers, sauté until tender and freeze them flat in bags. No need to thaw before tossing into soups, skillet, or casseroles. * you can also put in a slow cooker with olive oil and let cook till soft.

Use For: Omelets, sloppy joes, meatloaf, fajitas, sauces.

Make Rice or Pasta in Advance

Cook a big batch of rice or pasta and portion it out into containers. Store in the fridge for 3–4 days.

Use For: Fried rice, stir fry, casseroles, bowls, soups.

Double and Freeze Casseroles

If you're already making one, go ahead and make two. Cover one tightly and freeze it for a future no-prep dinner.

Use For: Lasagna, baked ziti, enchiladas, chicken and rice, pot pie.

Freeze Leftover Soup in Muffin Tins

Pour cooled soup into muffin tins or silicone molds and freeze. Pop out and store in a bag for single servings.

Use For: Quick lunches, snacks, or a warm cup of soup with grilled cheese.

Freeze Cooked Bacon or Sausage

Bake a sheet pan of bacon or cook sausage links/patties, then freeze in bags. They heat up quickly for breakfast-for-dinner or topping baked potatoes.

Use For: Breakfast night, salads, baked potatoes, pasta dishes.

Keep a Bag of “Meal Starters”

Freeze small bags of chopped cooked chicken, prepped veggies, or leftover sauces that can quickly turn into a meal when tossed in a skillet.

Use For: One-pan meals, quesadillas, wraps, quick soups.

Big Family Tip:

Double your main dish and freeze half for another day. You're already cooking—why not bless your future self while you're at it?

🍴 Emergency Dinners When the Money's Tight

Because feeding your family well doesn't always take much

There are seasons when the budget stretches thin—maybe too thin. You open the fridge and wonder how to make a meal out of what's left. I've been there, and if you're there now, please know: you're not alone. This list is for those days. These meals may not be fancy, but they're filling, comforting, and made from simple ingredients you can usually find at the back of the pantry or tucked in the freezer. Sometimes, knowing *what* to cook is harder than cooking it—and this little list is meant to ease that load.

10 Simple Emergency Dinners

- 1. Pasta with Butter or Oil and Seasoning**
Boil noodles, toss with butter or oil, salt, garlic powder, or whatever seasonings you have. Add peas or shredded cheese if available.
- 2. Eggs and Toast**
Scrambled, fried, or hard-boiled—served with toast, tortillas, or crackers. Add fruit or veggies if available.
- 3. Bean and Cheese Quesadillas**
Tortillas (even homemade) filled with canned beans and cheese or seasoning. Fry on the skillet or bake until crispy.
- 4. Rice and Whatever You Have**
Cooked rice with a fried egg, frozen veggies, or soy sauce. Or stir in salsa, cheese, or canned soup.
- 5. Soup from Cans and Leftovers**
Combine any leftover veggies, pasta, broth, or canned goods into a soup. Add rice, potatoes, or beans to bulk it up.
- 6. Peanut Butter Sandwiches and Fruit**
Classic, simple, and filling. If no bread, use crackers or tortillas.
- 7. Homemade Pancakes or Waffles**
A breakfast-for-dinner meal made with pantry staples like flour, eggs, and milk (or powdered milk). Serve with jam or syrup.
- 8. Baked Potatoes with Toppings**
Microwave or oven-bake. Top with butter, cheese, beans, or whatever bits you have left.

9. **Fried Rice or Noodle Stir-Fry**

Use leftover rice or ramen noodles. Add scrambled egg and frozen or canned veggies. Season with soy sauce or bouillon.

10. **Canned Tuna or Chicken Over Crackers or Rice**

Mix with mayo or just season it simply. Add to crackers, toast, or rice. A little goes a long way.

♥ **A Note to the Mom in a Hard Season**

If you're staring down another dinner with barely enough in the cupboards, please hear this from one mom to another: you are doing so much more than you think. It might not feel like much when you're pulling together peanut butter sandwiches or stretching rice for the third night in a row—but love is laced into every bite you serve. And that matters. These seasons don't last forever, even if they feel like they do. One day, you'll look back and realize just how much strength and care it took to get through. You're not failing—you're feeding hearts and bellies the best way you can.

So take a deep breath. Light a candle. Say a prayer over what you have. And know this: simple food served with love is still a gift. You are still a gift. And your children are richly blessed to have you. You've got this, Mama. And I'm cheering you on.

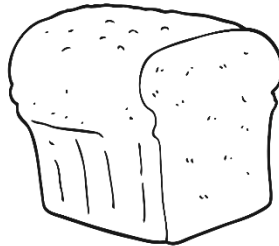
Chapter 5

Our Favorite Simple Breads

There's nothing quite like the smell of fresh bread baking in the oven. It wraps around your home like a warm hug and makes even the simplest dinner feel special. In our house, bread is a daily staple—something we rely on, pass around the table, and tuck into lunchboxes or serve with soup on chilly nights.

This chapter is filled with the tried-and-true breads we've come to love over the years. They're not complicated or fussy. Most use ingredients you already have on hand and don't require a bread machine or any fancy tools. Just a bowl, your hands, and a little time.

Whether it's a batch of hamburger buns, buttery breadsticks, sweet cornmeal rolls, or a chewy homemade bagel, there's something deeply satisfying about making bread from scratch. And it's not just about feeding your family—it's about slowing down, kneading a little love into the dough, and filling your kitchen with the kind of warmth that doesn't come from a store.



Bread Bowls

These homemade bread bowls are perfect for serving soup or stew in the coziest way. The outside is golden and firm, while the inside stays soft and chewy—just right for tearing apart and dipping.

Ingredients:

- 3 cups warm water
- 1 1/2 tablespoons yeast
- 2 tablespoons + 1/2 teaspoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 4 tablespoons butter, softened
- 7 to 9 cups flour
- 1 egg white + a splash of milk (for brushing)

Instructions:

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine warm water, yeast, and sugar. Let sit for 5–10 minutes until bubbly.
 2. Stir in salt, butter, and enough flour to form a soft dough (start with 7 cups and add more as needed).
 3. Knead until smooth and elastic—about 6–8 minutes by hand or 4–5 in a mixer.
 4. Place in a greased bowl, cover, and let rise until doubled (about 1 hour).
 5. Divide dough into 8 equal pieces. Shape into round balls and place on a greased baking sheet.
 6. Use a sharp knife to cut an "X" on top of each bowl.
 7. Beat the egg white with a splash of milk and brush over the tops.
 8. Bake at 375°F for 25–30 minutes until golden brown.
-

Homemade Sub Sandwich Rolls

These soft sandwich rolls are perfect for meatball subs, lunchmeat sandwiches, or homemade hoagies. They're tender and easy to slice.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups hot water
- 2 tablespoons yeast
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 3 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 cup oil (8 tablespoons)
- 5 1/2 cups flour
- Butter, for brushing after baking

Instructions:

1. In a large bowl, mix hot water, yeast, and sugar. Let rest until foamy.
 2. Stir in salt, oil, and flour. Mix until dough forms and pulls away from the sides of the bowl.
 3. Knead until soft and elastic, about 5–7 minutes.
 4. Cover and let rise until doubled (about 1 hour).
 5. Divide dough and shape into long sub rolls. Place on a baking sheet and let rise again while the oven preheats.
 6. Bake at 375°F for 20–25 minutes or until lightly golden.
 7. Brush with butter after baking and cover with a towel to keep them soft.
-

Homemade Hamburger Buns

These soft and fluffy hamburger buns hold up beautifully to all your favorite sandwich fillings. They're easy to shape and bake, and make any meal feel just a little more special.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup + 2 tablespoons warm water
- 2 tablespoons yeast
- 1/3 cup oil
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 1/2 cups flour

Instructions:

1. In a large bowl, combine warm water, yeast, sugar, and oil. Let sit for 5–10 minutes until bubbly.
 2. Stir in the egg, salt, and flour. Mix well until a soft dough forms.
 3. Knead until smooth and elastic, about 5–7 minutes.
 4. Cover and let rise until doubled in size (about 1 hour).
 5. Divide the dough into 8–10 portions and shape into round buns.
 6. Place on a greased baking sheet, flatten slightly, and let rise again while the oven preheats.
 7. Bake at 375°F for 12–15 minutes or until lightly golden.
 8. Cool on a rack and slice when ready to use.
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Restaurant-Style Breadsticks

These buttery, garlicky breadsticks taste just like your favorite sit-down pizza place. Soft on the inside and golden on the outside, they're a hit every time.

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon yeast
- 1 cup warm water
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 2 1/2 cups flour
- Butter, garlic powder, and Italian seasoning (for topping)

Instructions:

1. In a mixing bowl, dissolve yeast and sugar in warm water. Let stand until foamy.
2. Add salt, oil, and flour. Mix until soft dough forms.
3. Knead for 5 minutes, then cover and let rise for 30–45 minutes.
4. Divide dough and roll into long "snakes." Flatten slightly and twist the ends if you'd like.
5. Place on a greased baking sheet and let rise another 20 minutes.
6. Bake at 400°F for 12–15 minutes until golden brown.
7. While hot, brush with melted butter and sprinkle with garlic powder and Italian seasoning.

Cornmeal Rolls

These tender rolls have a touch of sweetness and a hint of cornmeal that gives them just the right texture. They go beautifully with soup or a Sunday roast and are always a welcome change from plain bread.

Ingredients:

- 1/3 cup cornmeal
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 cup oil
- 2 cups milk
- 1 tablespoon yeast
- 1/4 cup warm water
- 2 eggs
- 4 cups flour

Instructions:

1. In a saucepan, combine cornmeal, sugar, salt, oil, and milk. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture thickens. Remove from heat and let it cool to lukewarm.
 2. In a small bowl, dissolve yeast in warm water. Let sit until bubbly.
 3. Stir the yeast mixture and eggs into the cooled cornmeal mixture.
 4. Gradually add flour, mixing until a soft dough forms.
 5. Knead until smooth, then place in a greased bowl and let rise until doubled (about 1 hour).
 6. Divide dough into rolls and place on a greased baking sheet or in a baking dish.
 7. Let rise again while the oven preheats.
 8. Bake at 375°F for 15–20 minutes or until golden on top.
-

Classic Cornbread

This is our go-to cornbread recipe—sweet, tender, and perfect with chili, beans, or a simple slab of butter and honey. It bakes up beautifully in a 9×13 pan and feeds a crowd.

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cups cornmeal
- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 3 heaping teaspoons baking powder
- 2 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 3 tablespoons melted margarine (or butter)

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and grease a 9×13-inch baking pan.
 2. In a large bowl, mix together cornmeal, flour, sugar, salt, and baking powder.
 3. Add in eggs, milk, and melted margarine. Beat with an electric mixer until smooth.
 4. Pour into the prepared pan and spread evenly.
 5. Bake for 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.
 6. Let cool slightly before slicing and serving.
-

Homemade Bagels

There's something so satisfying about making bagels from scratch. These are chewy, golden, and just right for toasting. Don't be intimidated—the process is easier than you think, and the results are so worth it.

Ingredients:

- 3 1/2 cups bread flour
- 2 teaspoons yeast
- 1 1/2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1 1/3 cups warm water
- 2 tablespoons sugar (for the boiling water)

Instructions:

1. In a large bowl, mix warm water, yeast, and sugar. Let sit until foamy.
 2. Stir in the salt and flour until a dough forms. Knead for 8–10 minutes until smooth and elastic.
 3. Cover and let rise in a warm place for about 1 hour, or until doubled.
 4. Punch down the dough and divide into 8 pieces. Shape each into a ball, then poke a hole in the center and gently stretch it into a bagel shape.
 5. Let shaped bagels rest while bringing a large pot of water to a boil. Add 2 tablespoons of sugar to the boiling water.
 6. Boil bagels 1–2 minutes per side, then remove with a slotted spoon.
 7. Place on a greased or parchment-lined baking sheet. If desired, sprinkle with toppings like sesame seeds, poppy seeds, or coarse salt.
 8. Bake at 400°F for 18–20 minutes until golden brown.
-

Soft Pretzels

These soft pretzels are chewy, golden, and buttery—perfect for snacking or serving with soup. Boiling them briefly in baking soda water gives them that signature texture.

Ingredients:

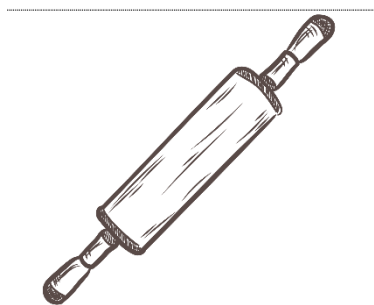
- 1 1/2 cups warm water
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon yeast
- 4 1/2 cups flour
- 10 cups water
- 2/3 cup baking soda (for boiling)
- Butter and coarse salt for topping

Instructions:

1. In a large bowl, stir together warm water, sugar, and yeast. Let sit until foamy.
 2. Add salt and flour and mix until a dough forms. Knead until smooth (about 5–7 minutes).
 3. Cover and let rise until doubled—about 1 hour.
 4. Punch down and divide dough into 12 pieces. Roll each into a rope and twist into a pretzel shape.
 5. Bring 10 cups of water and baking soda to a boil in a large pot.
 6. Carefully drop each pretzel into the boiling water for 30 seconds. Remove with a slotted spoon and place on a parchment-lined baking sheet.
 7. Bake at 425°F for 12–15 minutes until golden brown.
 8. Brush with melted butter and sprinkle with coarse salt while still warm.
-

There's a rhythm to bread-making that feels like a quiet kind of peace—mixing, rising, shaping, baking. It slows us down in the best way. These simple bread recipes have seen us through busy weekdays, special meals, and moments when we just needed something warm to share. I hope they become just as much a part of your home as they are in mine.

So whether you're kneading dough with little ones at your side or pulling out a pan of rolls for a potluck dinner, may the work of your hands bless your table and the hearts around it. Bread may be simple, but the love behind it never is.



Chapter 6: Sweet Treats & Simple Desserts

There's something special about a homemade dessert. It doesn't have to be fancy to feel like a treat—just a little something sweet to finish a meal, brighten an afternoon, or make an ordinary day feel like a celebration. In our home, desserts are part of the rhythm of family life. A warm pan of apple crunch on a Sunday afternoon. A tray of cookies after school. A creamy pudding salad passed around at a church gathering. These aren't complicated recipes—but they're full of love, tradition, and that down-home goodness that makes people ask for seconds.

Most of the sweets in this chapter use basic pantry ingredients, and many can be made ahead or whipped up in a pinch. Whether you're baking for a crowd or just want to surprise your little ones with something extra, these desserts are tried and true favorites from our kitchen to yours.

Ho Ho Cake

This rich chocolate cake with a creamy filling and shiny ganache top reminds me of those little snack cakes we'd sneak into lunchboxes—but so much better when it's homemade. It's a crowd-pleaser for birthdays, potlucks, or just a sweet treat after dinner.

Cake Layer:

Prepare your favorite chocolate cake recipe (or use a boxed mix if you're short on time) in a greased 9x13 pan. Let it cool completely.

Filling:

- 5 Tbsp flour
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup shortening
- ½ cup butter
- 1 tsp vanilla

Cook the flour and milk in a saucepan over medium heat until thickened. Cool completely. In a separate bowl, cream together sugar, shortening, butter, and vanilla. Add the cooled flour mixture and beat until fluffy. Spread over cooled cake.

Topping:

- 1 cup chocolate chips
- 6 Tbsp butter

Melt together and pour over the filling. Chill until set.

Homemade Caramel Apples

These are fall in a bite—sweet, sticky, and perfect for licking off your fingers. Wrap them up individually for a treat that feels extra special.

Ingredients:

- ½ cup butter
- 2 cups brown sugar
- 1 cup corn syrup
- Dash of salt
- 1 (14 oz) can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 6–8 apples, washed and dried
- Sticks for dipping

Melt butter, brown sugar, corn syrup, and salt in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Slowly add the sweetened condensed milk and continue to cook, stirring, until mixture reaches 240°F on a candy thermometer. Remove from heat, stir in vanilla, and dip apples. Let cool on greased parchment or wax paper.

Cinnamon Roll Cookies

All the flavor of a cinnamon roll in a soft, buttery cookie! These are so fun to make and even more fun to eat with a cup of coffee or glass of milk.

Cookie Dough:

- 2¼ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ tsp baking powder
- ¼ tsp salt
- ¾ cup butter, softened
- ¾ cup sugar
- 1 large egg
- 2 tsp vanilla

Whisk dry ingredients. In another bowl, beat butter and sugar until creamy. Add egg and vanilla. Slowly add dry ingredients. Chill dough for 30 minutes.

Filling:

- 2 Tbsp butter, melted
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 Tbsp cinnamon

Roll dough into a rectangle on a floured surface. Brush with melted butter, sprinkle with cinnamon sugar, and roll up like a jelly roll. Slice and bake at 350°F for 10–12 minutes.

Icing:

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 3 Tbsp milk
- ½ tsp vanilla

Whisk and drizzle over cooled cookies.

Grandma's Prairie Apple Crunch

This old-fashioned recipe tastes like something straight off a prairie table. It's soft, spiced apples tucked under a buttery crumble—no fuss, just comfort.

Ingredients:

- 6 apples, peeled and sliced
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- Dash of nutmeg

Toss together and place in a greased 9x13 dish.

Topping:

- 1 cup oats
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup flour
- ½ cup butter, cut in pieces

Mix together with your hands until crumbly, then sprinkle over apples. Bake at 350°F for 40–45 minutes until golden and bubbling.

Watergate Salad

This creamy, fluffy, vintage-style salad has been on potluck tables and holiday spreads for generations. It's sweet, a little tangy, and full of texture—soft marshmallows, crunchy nuts, and juicy pineapple all folded into a dreamy green fluff. You can serve it as a side or a light dessert... either way, it's always a hit.

Ingredients:

- 1 (3.4 oz) box pistachio Jell-O instant pudding mix
- 1 (20 oz) can crushed pineapple, *with juice*
- 1 cup miniature marshmallows
- ½ cup chopped nuts (walnuts or pecans work great)
- 1 (8 oz) container Cool Whip, thawed

Directions:

In a large bowl, stir together the pistachio pudding mix and the entire can of crushed pineapple (juice and all). Fold in the marshmallows and chopped nuts. Gently stir in the Cool Whip until fully combined and fluffy. Chill for at least 2 hours before serving. For a pretty presentation, serve with a sprinkle of extra nuts or a cherry on top.

Tip: This keeps well in the fridge for a couple of days—great for making ahead!

Build-Your-Own Banana Split Ice Cream Bar (All Homemade Toppings)

When the weather is warm or you're celebrating something special, there's nothing quite like an old-fashioned banana split. This version keeps it simple and fun—no crust, no baking—just bowls of homemade toppings and scoops of ice cream, all ready to go. Everyone gets to build their own just the way they like it, and it's always a hit with kids *and* grown-ups. Set this up on the counter or kitchen table with bowls of each topping and a tray of sliced bananas and scooped ice cream. Let everyone create their own masterpiece!

Start With:

- Bananas, sliced lengthwise
- Vanilla, chocolate, and/or strawberry ice cream

Homemade Chocolate Syrup

- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 cup water
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

Whisk sugar, cocoa, water, and salt in a saucepan. Simmer for 5–8 minutes until slightly thickened. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla. Cool before serving.

Homemade Caramel Sauce

- ½ cup butter
- 2 cups brown sugar
- 1 cup light corn syrup
- Dash of salt
- 1 (14 oz) can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 tsp vanilla

Melt butter, sugar, syrup, and salt over medium heat. Stir constantly and bring to a gentle boil. Add sweetened condensed milk and cook until mixture reaches 240°F (soft ball stage). Remove from heat, stir in vanilla, and cool slightly.

Fresh Strawberry Topping

- 1½ cups diced fresh strawberries
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp lemon juice

Toss together and let sit for 20–30 minutes until syrupy.

Homemade Pineapple Topping

- 1 (20 oz) can crushed pineapple (in juice)
- 1 Tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp cornstarch

Combine in a saucepan. Simmer for 5–7 minutes until thickened slightly. Cool before serving.

Chopped Peanuts

Roughly chop roasted peanuts or pecans and place in a small bowl for topping.

Homemade Whipped Cream

- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 2 Tbsp powdered sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla

Whip until soft peaks form. Serve in a chilled bowl with a spoon.

Assembly Tips:

Let each person take a banana, scoop some ice cream, and top it with as much homemade goodness as they like. You can add maraschino cherries, chocolate chips, or sprinkles if you'd like to dress it up even more.

Memory Maker: This is a favorite for birthday parties, Sunday afternoons, or just a fun family night when everyone needs a little extra sweetness.

Ambrosia Salad

This old-fashioned favorite brings sunshine to the table with just a few simple ingredients. It's light, creamy, and full of sweet fruit—and those little bites of marshmallow and coconut make it feel extra special. We love it for Sunday dinner or as a "just because" treat when the day calls for something cheerful.

This version uses whipped topping for that fluffy texture and gets finished off with a few maraschino cherries to make it look as sweet as it tastes.

Ingredients:

- 1 (11 oz) can mandarin oranges, drained
- 1 (20 oz) can pineapple tidbits or chunks, drained
- 1½ cups mini marshmallows
- 1 cup shredded sweetened coconut
- ½ cup sour cream (*optional, for a slight tang*)
- 1 (8 oz) tub Cool Whip, thawed
- Maraschino cherries, for topping

Directions:

In a large bowl, gently mix together the mandarin oranges, pineapple, marshmallows, and coconut. If using sour cream, fold that in now. Gently stir in the Cool Whip until everything is well coated and fluffy.

Cover and chill for at least 1 hour before serving. Top with a few maraschino cherries just before bringing it to the table.

Tip: This salad keeps well in the fridge for a day or two and is even better the next day once the flavors blend.

Chocolate and Cream Pie

This is one of those timeless pies that always disappears first at the table. It's rich, smooth, and simple—with a homemade chocolate filling that tastes far better than anything from a box. Topped with a big cloud of whipped cream and served chilled, it's a classic you'll turn to again and again.

Ingredients:

- 1 pre-baked 9-inch pie crust (homemade or store-bought)
- ½ cup sugar
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- ¼ tsp salt
- 2¾ cups whole milk
- 3 large egg yolks, lightly beaten
- 2 Tbsp butter
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

Topping:

- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 2 Tbsp powdered sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- Optional: chocolate shavings or a sprinkle of cocoa for garnish

Directions:

In a medium saucepan, whisk together sugar, cocoa powder, cornstarch, and salt. Gradually add in the milk, whisking until smooth.

Place over medium heat and cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture thickens and begins to bubble—about 6–8 minutes. Continue cooking and stirring for 1 more minute.

Remove from heat. Stir a little of the hot mixture into the beaten egg yolks to temper them, then slowly add the yolks into the pan, stirring constantly. Return to heat and cook 2 more minutes, until very thick.

Remove from heat again. Stir in the butter and vanilla until smooth. Pour the warm filling into the baked pie crust and smooth the top. Let cool slightly, then cover and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, or until completely set.

Whipped Cream Topping:

Beat heavy cream, powdered sugar, and vanilla together until soft peaks form. Spread over chilled pie before serving. Garnish with chocolate shavings if you like.

Tip: You can make this a day ahead—just wait to top with whipped cream until right before serving for the fluffiest texture.

Coconut Cream Pie

This pie is pure comfort in every bite—creamy, sweet, and full of coconut flavor. It's the kind of dessert that reminds me of grandma's kitchen, with the smell of custard on the stove and toasted coconut cooling on a little plate nearby. Serve it well chilled with a big dollop of whipped cream, and you've got yourself a classic treat that never goes out of style.

Ingredients:

- 1 pre-baked 9-inch pie crust (homemade or store-bought)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup cornstarch
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp salt
- 3 cups whole milk
- 4 large egg yolks, lightly beaten
- 2 Tbsp butter
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp vanilla extract
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups sweetened shredded coconut

Topping:

- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 2 Tbsp powdered sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup toasted coconut, for garnish

Directions:

In a saucepan, whisk together sugar, cornstarch, and salt. Slowly whisk in the milk until smooth. Place over medium heat and stir constantly until the mixture thickens and comes to a gentle boil.

Temper the eggs by stirring a small amount of the hot mixture into the egg yolks, then slowly pour the eggs back into the pan, whisking constantly. Cook for 2–3 more minutes until thick and creamy.

Remove from heat. Stir in butter, vanilla, and shredded coconut. Pour the filling into the baked pie crust and smooth the top. Let cool, then refrigerate for at least 4 hours or overnight until firm.

Whipped Cream Topping:

Beat the heavy cream with powdered sugar and vanilla until soft peaks form. Spread over chilled pie and sprinkle with toasted coconut.

Tip: To toast coconut, just spread it on a baking sheet and bake at 325°F for 5–8 minutes, stirring occasionally, until golden brown.

Blueberry Cobbler

This is one of those desserts that fills the whole house with the smell of summer. Whether you're using fresh-picked blueberries or a bag from the freezer, it bakes into a bubbling, sweet dish with a soft golden crust on top. It's best served warm with a scoop of vanilla ice cream melting over the top.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups fresh or frozen blueberries
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp cornstarch
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp cinnamon (*optional*)

Topping:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp baking powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter, melted
- Optional: coarse sugar for sprinkling

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. In a 9x9 baking dish, stir together the blueberries, sugar, lemon juice, cornstarch, and cinnamon if using.

In a bowl, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Stir in the milk and melted butter until a thick batter forms.

Drop the batter by spoonfuls over the berries. It won't cover completely, but that's part of its charm. Sprinkle with a little sugar if you'd like a crisp top.

Bake for 40–45 minutes, or until the topping is golden and the filling is bubbly. Serve warm.

Peach Cobbler

Peach cobbler is a staple in so many homes for good reason—it's easy to make, full of juicy fruit, and tastes like something your grandma would pull out of the oven on a Sunday afternoon. You can use fresh, canned, or frozen peaches and it always turns out delicious.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups sliced peaches (fresh or 2 cans, drained)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp cornstarch
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp cinnamon

Topping:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp baking powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter, melted
- Optional: dash of nutmeg or extra sugar on top

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Place the peaches in a greased 9x9 baking dish.

Stir in the sugar, lemon juice, cornstarch, and cinnamon.

In a bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Stir in the milk and melted butter to make a thick batter.

Drop spoonfuls of batter on top of the peaches. It's okay if the fruit peeks through—this dessert is meant to be rustic and simple.

Bake for 40–45 minutes until golden and bubbly. Serve warm with whipped cream or a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

There's just something about a homemade dessert that brings people together. Whether it's a pie made from scratch, a scoop of cobbler still warm from the oven, or a chilled bowl of fluffy "salad" passed around the table, these sweet treats are more than just recipes—they're memories in the making. You don't need fancy ingredients or picture-perfect results. Just a willing heart, a few pantry staples, and a desire to bless your family with something simple and special.

However you choose to serve them—on ordinary days or as part of a celebration—I hope these desserts bring joy to your kitchen and sweet moments to your table.

Closing Words

And just like that, we've come to the end of the cookbook—but not the end of your beautiful work in the kitchen.

I hope these pages have reminded you that feeding your family doesn't have to be complicated to be meaningful. It's in the ordinary meals, the quiet table conversations, the smell of something baking while the laundry tumbles nearby—that's where real life and real love live.

Keep showing up, even when it feels unnoticed. Keep making simple meals with thankful hands. Keep smiling at those sweet faces across the table. Because your kitchen isn't just a place for food—it's where faith is lived out, one meal at a time.

You've got this, Momma. And I'm so glad we could walk through this together.

With all my heart,
Amy Maryon