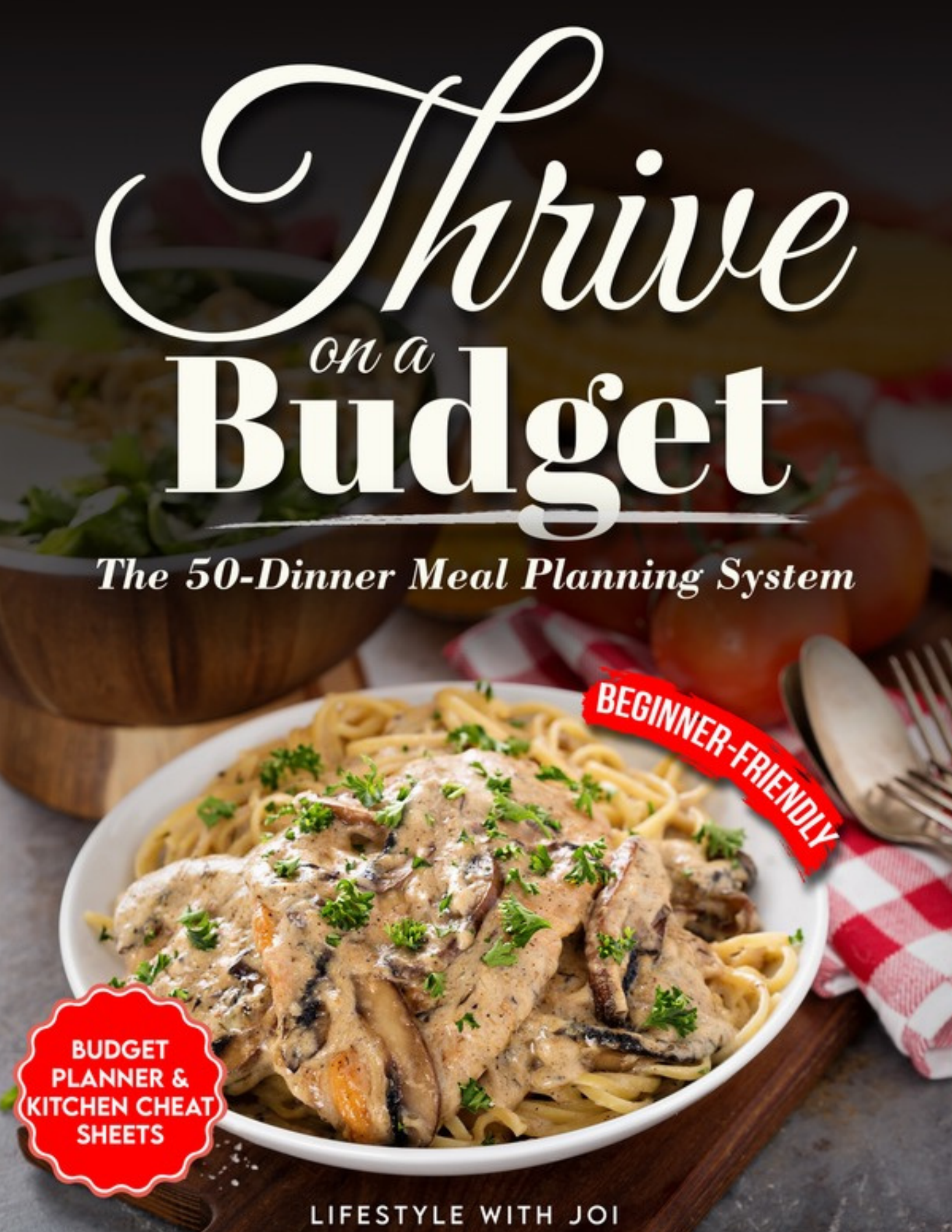
Thrive
on a
Budget
The 50-Dinner Meal Planning System
BEGINNER-FRIENDLY
BUDGET PLANNER & KITCHEN CHEAT SHEETS
LIFESTYLE WITH JOI

Dedication

To my mother, who doesn't just survive but thrives, always finding a way out of no way. You inspire through your quiet strength and stability.

Thank you for your sacrifices and the lessons in perseverance you instilled in me.

I love you.

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Terms, Conditions & Disclaimers

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Medical & Nutrition Disclaimer: The information provided in this cookbook is for educational and informational purposes only and is not intended as medical or nutritional advice. The author is not a licensed doctor, dietitian, or nutritionist.

- No Nutritional Data: This book does not provide calorie counts, macronutrient breakdowns, or specific nutritional data. If you are following a strict medical diet (such as for diabetes or heart health), please use a third-party nutritional calculator or consult your healthcare provider to ensure these recipes meet your specific requirements.
- Allergies & Sensitivities: It is the reader's responsibility to check ingredient labels for potential allergens. The author is not responsible for any adverse reactions or medical issues resulting from the preparation or consumption of these recipes.
- Kitchen Safety: Use caution when handling sharp tools and heat. The author is not responsible for any adverse reactions, injuries, or damages resulting from the use of the recipes or information contained herein.

Cost Disclaimer: The price breakdowns provided are estimated averages based on standard U.S. grocery store pricing at the time of publication. Please note that actual costs may vary significantly based on your geographic location, seasonal availability, specific brands, and local sales.

These calculations are based on the full package and proportional cost of the ingredients used in the recipe (the "cost per serving"). To maximize your budget, I recommend using the leftover portions of these ingredients across other recipes in this book.

Photography Disclaimer: The photographs in this book are intended for inspiration and to showcase the potential of each dish. Home cooking involves variables such as specific ingredient brands, oven calibration, and individual technique; your final result may look different than the images shown.

These recipes are designed to be a foundation. I encourage you to experiment, substitute ingredients to your liking, and make each dish your own. Remember: the goal is a tasty meal in your kitchen, not a perfect replica of the photo.

How to Use This System

This system is designed to take the mental load out of meal planning. To get the most out of these resources, follow this simple three-step flow.

Step 1: Audit Your Kitchen. Before you shop, use the *Guide to a Well-Stocked Kitchen* included in this system. Knowing precisely what you already have is essential to avoiding unnecessary spending and reducing food waste.

Step 2: Plan Your Meals. Choose your favorites from the *50 Dinner Recipes* and plug them into the *Daily, Weekly, or Monthly Meal Plan Worksheets*. Use the *Meal Ideas and Snack Ideas* sheets to round out your plan so you are never left wondering what to eat.

Step 3: Shop With Precision. Every recipe in this book includes an *Individual Recipe Grocery Shopping List* with estimated pricing. These tools ensure you buy exactly what you need for each meal, with the cost upfront. Pair these with the *Budget Planning Worksheets* to set your spending limits before you head to the store.

Make it your own. The worksheets are yours to use however works best for your lifestyle. You can print them out to keep in a kitchen binder or use them digitally on your computer or tablet (ingredients can be added to the grocery list). This system is your foundation for a more organized and affordable kitchen.

About Joi

We are living through a time where a trip to the grocery store can feel like a source of stress rather than inspiration. Witnessing the struggle with rising grocery costs, I knew it was time to create something that would help us not just survive, but thrive.

This mission is deeply personal for me. For the first ten years of my life, my mother raised me as a single parent. I saw firsthand how she navigated the world on a strict budget. She never complained. Instead, she found creative ways to keep me well-fed with great meals every single night. She taught me that a budget isn't a barrier to quality; it is an invitation to be resourceful.

Following in her footsteps, I have realized that we shouldn't have to sacrifice flavor for affordability or forego good taste to save a few dollars. That is why I created *Thrive on a Budget: The 50-Dinner Meal Planning System*. This is more than just a collection of recipes. It is a comprehensive system designed to help you organize your kitchen, master your grocery spending, and bring joy back to the dinner table.

In these pages, you will find the same essence my mother brought to our kitchen. These tools and recipes are a foundation for your home. They are proof that you can feed yourself or your family well, regardless of what the receipt says at the checkout counter.

Thank you for allowing me to share this system with you. Happy cooking!

Lifestyle with Joi

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Matthew 6:31-33

MEAL PLANNING & GROCERY STRATEGIES

Getting Started with Meal Planning

Meal planning is more than just a kitchen hack; it's a way to reclaim your time, reduce waste, and make healthy eating the path of least resistance. Whether you're cooking for one or feeding a family, a simple plan replaces daily chaos with a clear routine.

Here's how meal planning can work for you:

What is Meal Planning?

At its simplest, meal planning is deciding what you'll eat before you actually have to cook it. This could be a full week of detailed recipes or just a rough sketch for the next few days. By making those decisions ahead of time, you stop "wondering" what's for dinner and start enjoying your meals.

Why Meal Plan?

- **Streamlines Shopping**: You will make fewer trips and move through the aisles faster because you know exactly what you need.
- **Reduces Waste:** You buy only what you will actually use, ensuring fresh ingredients end up on your plate rather than in the trash.
- **Supports Healthy Choices:** It removes the temptation of last-minute takeout and makes it easy to stick to balanced, nutritious meals.
- **Cuts Costs:** You can shop sales and use what you have on hand, avoiding expensive, unplanned grocery runs.
- **Beats Decision Fatigue:** It eliminates the nightly "What's for dinner?" stress, freeing up your mental energy for the rest of your day.
- **Encourages Creativity:** Planning gives you the space to try new recipes and flavors without the pressure of a ticking clock.
- **Improves Family Harmony:** Knowing the plan helps everyone share the workload and gently reduces arguments.

:

Meal planning not only makes life simpler, but can also make time in the kitchen more enjoyable and meaningful. You might find a new sense of comfort and satisfaction as you cook. Ready to give it a try?

STEP ONE

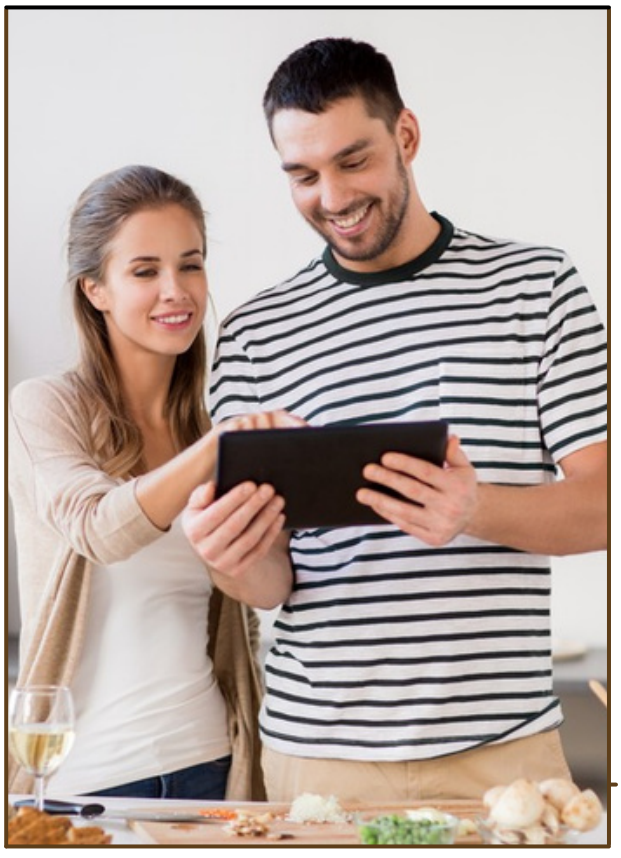
Plan Your Prep Day Strategically

- **Pick a Consistent Day**: Choose a block of time, like Sunday afternoon or Monday evening, when you consistently have a few hours free. Treat this time as a non-negotiable appointment.
- **Theme Your Meals**: If you're new, stick to simple themes (e.g., all sheet-pan meals or all slow-cooker recipes) to simplify grocery shopping and cooking.

STEP TWO

Choose the Right Recipes

- **Focus on Stability**: Select recipes that hold up well when stored and reheated (e.g., chili, curries, roasted vegetables, grains like quinoa or rice). Avoid fried foods or delicate salads.
- **Batch Cook Staples**: Cook large quantities of neutral, base ingredients that can be used in different meals (e.g., plain chicken breasts, a large pot of rice, or a tray of roasted sweet potatoes).



STEP THREE

Master the Workflow (Mise en Place)

- **Do All Chopping First**: Get all your slicing, dicing, and mincing done at the start. This saves significant time later.
- **Multitask Cooking**: Utilize all your appliances simultaneously. Cook grains on the stovetop, roast vegetables in the oven, and prep meat in the slow cooker or air fryer.
- **Clean as You Go**: Wipe down counters and wash tools while food is cooking. This prevents a overwhelming cleanup at the end.

STEP FOUR

Storage & Safety

- **Invest in Containers**: Use airtight, microwave-safe containers that stack easily. Glass containers are excellent for reheating.
- **Portion Control**: Divide your prepped food into individual serving containers immediately after cooling. This makes grab-and-go lunches and dinners simple.
- **Date and Identify**: Label all containers with the meal name and the date they were prepared. This is crucial for food safety and for tracking freshness.
- **Cool Before Sealing**: Ensure all hot food is cooled completely before sealing the containers and placing them in the fridge. This prevents condensation and bacterial growth.

STEP FIVE

Final Organization & Staging

- **Stage Your Meals:** Place containers intended for the first two or three days of the week in the front of the refrigerator for easy grab-and-go access.
- **Freeze Strategically:** Immediately label and move any bulk batches or meals intended for the end of the week or beyond into the freezer to preserve freshness and stability.
- **Prep Assembly Areas**: Ensure all necessary non-prepped components (dressings, tortillas, bread, etc.) are easily accessible alongside the prepped food so the meal requires zero searching or effort when it's time to eat.

STEP SIX

Review and Plan for the Next Cycle

- **Take Notes on What Worked**: At the end of the week, record which recipes were successful and which ones should be retired or modified for next time.
- **Track Your Spending**: Review your grocery budget for the week by using tips from the *Budget Planning* section of the book. This accountability helps you identify areas where you saved money and where you can improve next time.
- **Schedule the Next Prep Session**: Immediately book your next prep day (back to Step 1). Consistency is the key to a permanent habit.

25 Ways to Outsmart Your Grocery Bill

Think of your budget like a ship. While big bills like rent or car payments are the solid parts of the boat you can count on, your grocery spending is often that slow, silent leak that threatens to sink the whole thing.

Food costs are tricky because they are so reactive; they fluctuate based on our moods, how hungry we are, and how well we can dodge the traps the store sets for us.

Most of us walk through those sliding doors with only a vague idea of what we need, only to walk out wondering how a few bags of food cost so much.

The truth is, without a plan, you're at the mercy of marketing. Everything from the layout of the aisles to the items placed at eye level is designed to get you to spend "just a few more dollars."

Let's be real. With prices today, we can't afford to let money rot in the fridge or pay double just because we're in a rush. How you shop sets the tone for your week. An unorganized trip is stressful, but outsmarting the store puts you back in charge of where your money goes.

Here are 25 ways to outsmart the grocery store and make every dollar count:

Shop in season.

Buying in season saves money and tastes better. Local or farmer's market produce is cheaper and at peak flavor and nutrition. It also requires less shipping and storage, making it a more sustainable choice.

Check unit prices.

Always compare unit prices to find the best deal, even between different sizes of the same product. To simplify this, look for the price-per-unit printed directly on the store's shelf tags. Making this a habit ensures you pay the lowest price for the quantity you need, leading to significant savings over time.

Hit the clearance racks.

Frequently scout the 'Manager's Special' or reduced-price sections for near-expiry items like dairy, bakery goods, and frozen foods. These products are often discounted by 30 to 50 percent and remain ideal for immediate use or freezing.

Check dates for freshness and value.

Use the "best by" date to your advantage. When comparing unit prices, check the expiration dates on perishables like yogurt, eggs, or milk. Selecting the furthest date gives you more time to use the product, but if you plan to use it immediately, you can often ask a staff member for a "close-dated" discount on items that haven't been marked down yet.

Buy in volume at warehouse clubs.

For the best value on items you use daily, buy in bulk. Warehouse clubs like Costco or commercial spots like Chef's Store offer deep discounts for larger quantities. Only buy what you know you will consume before it spoils to ensure actual savings, and try a guest membership first to make sure the inventory fits your needs.

Purchase by the pinch.

Utilize bulk bins to buy only the exact amount required. This strategy is perfect for spices and specialty ingredients needed for a single recipe. Buying a small pinch is significantly cheaper than a whole jar, which not only saves cash but also ensures your seasonings are always fresh.

Look beyond the big chains.

Don't limit yourself to major grocery stores. International markets often offer dramatically lower prices on spices, grains, and specific produce like peppers or root vegetables. Shopping here for your pantry essentials can provide high-quality, authentic ingredients at a fraction of the cost found at conventional supermarkets.

Strategize your organic purchases.

It is possible to eat organic on a budget by shopping smarter. Buy organic staples that are naturally cheaper, such as dried beans, lentils, whole grains, and basic organic produce like bananas and avocados. Check for seasonal deals at farmers' markets and compare prices across retailers (like Aldi, Whole Foods, Sprouts, and international stores).

Skip the brands.

Opt for generic or store brands to decrease costs. Instead of habitually reaching for familiar name brands, opting for the generic version can result in substantial savings over time, as these items are typically priced much lower.

Look high and low.

The most expensive items are always at eye level. Scan the entire shelf range high too low to find cheaper products, like store brands or budget-friendly alternatives, that you might otherwise overlook. Making this scan a habit can easily cut 10-20% off your total grocery bill over time.

Build your pantry gradually.

Focus on stocking essentials like spices, nuts, and specialty oils over time. By purchasing one or two high-cost ingredients on each trip, you steadily build a versatile pantry without a large upfront expense. This ensures you always have the necessary items on hand for any recipe.

Plan around key ingredients.

Find recipes that share similar components to ensure your groceries are used in different ways. When you purchase items in larger quantities, such as specific vegetables or specialty grains, planning multiple meals around them prevents waste and adds efficiency to your weekly cooking.

Stock and freeze.

Consider investing in a second freezer to fully leverage sales and bulk purchases. This allows you to secure meats and other perishables when prices are at their lowest. By stocking up on discounted items, the investment quickly pays for itself through consistent savings on your future meals.

Prep it yourself.

To maximize your budget, opt for whole produce and handle the preparation at home. Pre-chopped vegetables, fruits, and salad kits carry a high convenience fee, meaning you pay a significant premium for just a few minutes of saved time. That money is better spent on higher-quality ingredients or additional protein.

Go canned and frozen.

Choose frozen or canned (low-sodium) items, which are often cheaper than fresh while retaining flavor and nutrients. Frozen produce is picked at peak ripeness, while staples like canned beans, tuna, and salmon provide affordable protein with a long shelf life. This strategy maintains meal quality without the pressure of immediate spoilage.

Save by butchering your own meat.

Opt for whole cuts, such as a full chicken or turkey, which are significantly cheaper per pound than pre-cut pieces. Processing the meat yourself allows you to use every part across multiple recipes, and the bones can be simmered into a cost-effective homemade broth. This approach ensures nothing is wasted, stretching your budget further.

Try “Meatless” Monday.

Commit to meat-free meals once or twice a week to significantly reduce costs. Plant-based proteins like lentils, beans, and tofu are much more affordable than meat and naturally boost your intake of beneficial fiber. This simple habit lowers your grocery bill while diversifying your diet.

Cook with versatile proteins.

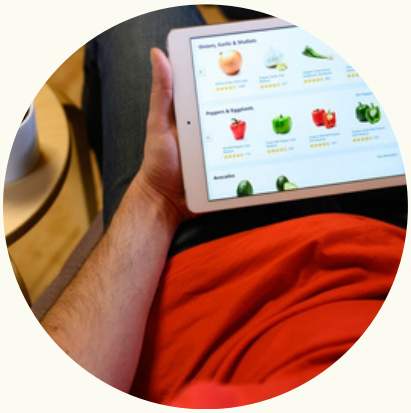
Substitute expensive cuts of meat with budget-friendly alternatives like ground poultry or tinned fish. These options provide high-quality nutrition at a fraction of the cost and can be easily adapted into various dishes, making it simpler to stay within your food budget.

Watch for holiday leftovers.

In the days following a major holiday, check the meat department for deep markdowns on seasonal roasts like whole turkeys, hams, or legs of lamb. Stores must clear this inventory quickly, offering sale prices on items that are ideal for freezing or large-batch cooking.

Use store apps.

Download your regular grocery store’s app or join their loyalty program to access exclusive deals and personalized offers. Clipping digital coupons takes only a few minutes before you shop and ensures you never miss a discount on items you already planned to buy.



Time your visit.

Shop early in the morning or late in the evening to catch the best discounts. Many stores mark down meat, bakery, and produce items during these off-peak hours as they refresh their inventory. These items are ideal for immediate use or freezing, allowing you to secure products at a fraction of their original price.

Reduce impulse shopping.

Eliminate distractions and unplanned "grabs" by switching to online ordering for in-store pickup. Using a store's app forces you to stick to your list, allows you to track your running total in real-time, and bypasses the tempting displays found at the checkout. It is a powerful tool for maintaining strict budget discipline.

Compare across departments.

Routinely check prices for items sold in multiple categories. For example, shredded cheese is often cheaper in the dairy aisle than in the produce section near salad kits. Similarly, nuts are typically more affordable in the baking aisle than in the snack department. A quick scan of these related sections uncovers immediate savings on the exact same products.

"Reverse" meal plan.

Start with your store's weekly flyer rather than a recipe book. By planning your meals around what is already on sale, you prioritize discounted ingredients and ensure savings are built into your menu from the start. This simple flip in logic stretches the impact of every dollar and prevents your cravings from dictating your costs.

Try to price match.

Review your local store's policy to see if they honor competitors' advertised prices. This allows you to secure the lowest available rates on your entire list without the added time and fuel costs of visiting multiple locations. It's an easy way to consolidate your savings at a single stop.

DAILY MEAL PLAN

DATE:

BREAKFAST

SNACKS

LUNCH

SNACKS

DINNER

SNACKS

NOTES

WEEKLY MEAL PLAN

WEEK:

DATE:

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY

SHOPPING LIST

WEEKLY MEAL PLAN

WEEK:

DATE:

	BREAKFAST	LUNCH	DINNER	SNACKS
MON				
TUE				
WED				
THU				
FRI				
SAT				
SUN				

MONTHLY MEAL PLAN

MONTH:

DATE:

WEEK 1	
WEEK 2	
WEEK 3	
WEEK 4	
WEEK 5	

MONTHLY MEAL PLAN

MONTH:

DATE:

	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
SUN				
MON				
TUE				
WED				
THU				
FRI				
SAT				

GROCERY LIST

WEEK:

DATE:

FROZEN	PROTEIN	DRY GOODS

FRUITS	VEGETABLES	DAIRY

GROCERY LIST

WEEK:

DATE:

PANTRY INVENTORY

MONTH:

Item/Meal	Used By	Quantity	AVAILABE ✓	USED ✗

FRIDGE INVENTORY

MONTH:

Item/Meal	Used By	Quantity	AVAILABE ✓	USED ✗

SEASONING INVENTORY

MONTH:

Seasoning	Used By	Quantity	AVAILABE ✓	USED ✗

SPICE INVENTORY

MONTH:

Spice	Used By	Quantity	AVAILABE ✓	USED ✗

RECIPE PLANNER

NAME:

PREP TIME:

CATEGORY:

Ingredients

Notes

MEAL IDEAS

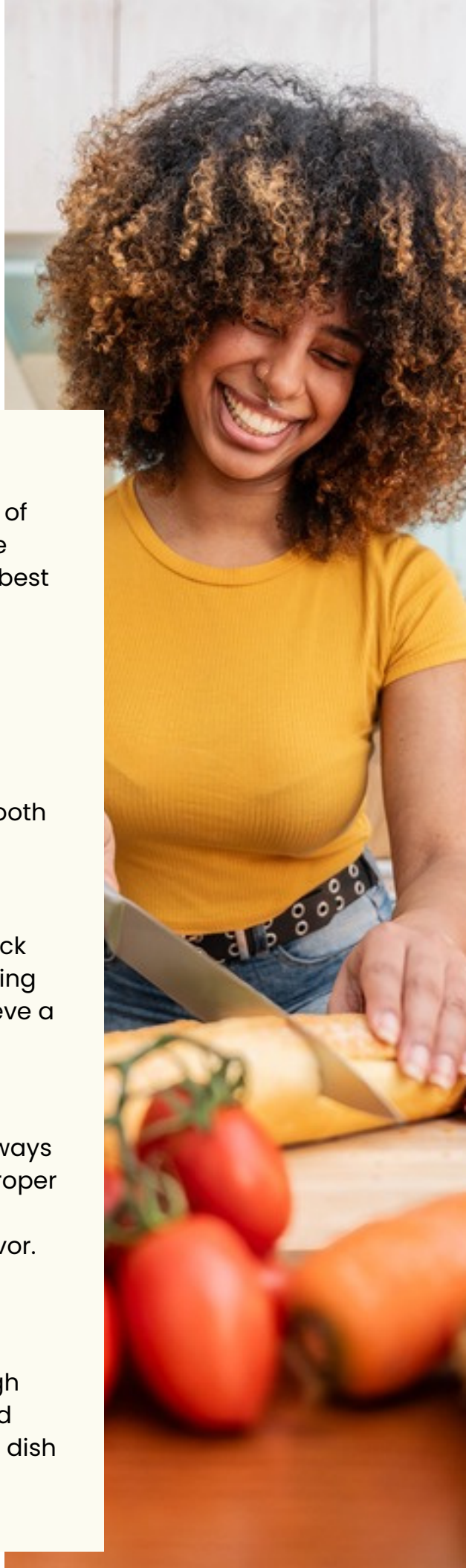
SNACK IDEAS

NOTES

COOKING METHODS &TOOLS

Pro-Level Cooking Fundamentals

Every great home chef relies on a handful of core principles, not just recipes. Adopt these five essential tips to cook with confidence and achieve excellent results every time.



1. Prioritize quality and seasonality.
The quality of your ingredients dictates the flavor of your final dish. Prioritizing fresh, seasonal produce and high-quality proteins is key to achieving the best taste.

2. Embrace the “mise en place.”
Adopt the habit of "everything in its place." Before turning on the stove, fully prep all ingredients, measure spices, and gather your tools. This organization eliminates stress and ensures a smooth cooking experience.

.

3. Season and taste continuously.
Flavor is a process. Don't wait until the end to check seasoning. Taste and adjust flavors (salt, something tangy, or heat) at every stage of cooking to achieve a perfectly balanced meal.

4. Leverage heat control and pan prep.
A fundamental skill is managing temperature. Always let pans fully preheat before adding oil or food. Proper heat control prevents sticking, ensures even browning, and is key to developing maximum flavor.

5. Patience is the secret ingredient.
Great food cannot be rushed. Whether you are searing meat, reducing a sauce, or letting a dough rest, the time you invest in simmering, resting, and developing flavor is often what separates a good dish from a great one.

5 Core Cooking Methods Every Cook Should Know

Understanding key cooking techniques is essential to perfecting the food you create. Here's a breakdown of five foundational methods to sharpen your culinary skills:

01

SAUTÉING
A quick method using medium-high heat and a small amount of fat.
- For fast cooking and even browning of smaller items, it is important not to overcrowd the pan, as this will cause steaming instead of proper browning.

02

SEARING
Cooking food at very high heat to achieve a crisp, caramelized crust for maximum flavor.
- To develop a deep crust on proteins like steak, chicken, or fish, you must ensure the pan is smoking hot and pat the proteins dry before starting.

03

ROASTING
Using dry heat in a preheated oven to cook food slowly and evenly, allowing natural sugars to caramelize.
- To cook large cuts of meat or achieve deep flavor in root vegetables, place the food in a single layer to guarantee full heat exposure and prevent steaming.

04

SIMMERING
A gentle, moist cooking method where liquids are heated just below boiling (small, gentle bubbles).
- To develop rich flavors in stocks, stews, and sauces without aggressive boiling, maintain a low, steady temperature since vigorous boiling can ruin the clarity or texture of the dish.

05

BAKING
A precise science relying on even, controlled heat distribution within an oven.
- To cook breads, cakes, pastries, and casseroles, you must always preheat your oven fully and measure all ingredients accurately.

The Flavor Builder: Troubleshooting Your Dish

🧂 SALT (The Enhancer)

Use it when: The flavors feel "quiet" or the dish tastes like nothing.

- The Fix: Kosher Salt, Sea Salt, Soy Sauce, Miso Paste, or Parmesan cheese.
- Pro Tip: Add salt in small increments. It takes a moment to dissolve and "unlock" the flavors.

🍋 ACID (The Brightener)

Use it when: The dish tastes "flat," "heavy," or "muddy." Acid provides a "zing."

- The Fix: Lemon/Lime Juice, Vinegar (Apple Cider, Balsamic, Rice), or White Wine.
- Pro Tip: If a soup or stew feels boring despite having enough salt, it almost always needs a splash of vinegar or citrus.

🍯 SWEET (The Balancer)

Use it when: A dish is too bitter, too spicy, or too acidic.

- The Fix: Honey, Maple Syrup, Brown Sugar, Orange Juice (splash)
- Pro Tip: You aren't trying to make it "sweet" like candy. You are just using the sugar to take the sharp edge off other flavors.

🔥 HEAT (The Personality)

Use it when: The dish lacks excitement or feels "one-note."

- The Fix: Red Pepper Flakes, Black Pepper, Hot Sauce, Fresh Chilies, or Cayenne.
- Pro Tip: Add heat toward the end of cooking to keep the spice "bright" and sharp.

🍄 UMAMI (The Depth)

Use it when: You want that "savory" or "meaty" satisfaction (even in veggie dishes).

- The Fix: Tomato Paste, Mushrooms, Worcestershire Sauce, or Liquid Aminos.
- Pro Tip: Searing your meat or vegetables until they are brown (the Maillard reaction) creates natural umami.

KITCHEN CONVERSIONS

LIQUID VOLUME	
1 teaspoon	5 mL
1/3 tablespoon	5 mL
1 tablespoon	20 mL
1/4 cup	60 mL
1/3 cup	80 mL
2/3 cup	160 mL
1/2 cup	125 mL
3/4 cup	185 mL
1 cup	250 mL

OVEN TEMPS

275°F	135°C
300°F	150°C
325°F	165°C
350°F	175°C
375°F	190°C
400°F	205°C
425°F	220°C
450°F	230°C
475°F	245°C

Moderate = 350°F/ 175°C

WEIGHT	
1/2 oz	14g
1 oz	28g
2.5 oz	70g
5 oz	140g
10 oz	280g
15 oz	425g
1 lb	454g
1 pinch	1/8 tsp
1 dash	1/16 tsp

SUBSTITUTIONS		
Baking Powder	1 tsp	1/2 tsp baking soda + 1/2 tsp lemon juice
Baking Soda	1 tsp	3 tsp baking powder
Self Raising Flour	1 cup	Add 2 tsp of baking powder for each 150g/6oz/1 cup plain flour
Cake Flour	1 cup	14 tbsp (110g) all purpose flour, spooned & leveled + 2 tbsp (16g) cornstarch
Sour Cream	1 cup	1 cup yogurt
Buttermilk	1 cup	1 cup milk + 1 tbsp vinegar or lemon juice
Tomato Sauce	1 cup	1/2 cup tomato paste + 1/2 cup water
Fresh Herbs	1 tbsp	1 tsp dried herbs
Vinegar	1/2 tsp	1 tsp lemon juice
Eggs	1	1/2 banana or 1/4 cup applesauce
Milk	1 cup	1/2 cup evaporated milk + 1/2 cup water
Cream of Tartar	1/4 tsp	1/4 tsp lemon juice + 1/4 tsp white vinegar

37 Essential Tools for Budget Meals

You don't need a kitchen full of high-end gadgets to eat well on a budget, but having the right basics makes a world of difference.

When you are first starting, cooking can feel like a chore. The right tools change that by helping you get the job done more quickly and with much less stress. Think of these items as your support system; they remove the hurdles that usually make cooking at home feel like a struggle.

The goal isn't to go out and buy all thirty-seven items at once. These were selected because they are the essentials that provide the most value and flexibility in the kitchen.

If you are starting from zero, focus on the basics first and keep an eye out for deals at discount stores or second-hand shops. You would be surprised how many quality tools can be found for just a few dollars.

By investing, over time, you are setting yourself up for success. When you have what you need to prep, cook, and store your food correctly, you are ready for any recipe that comes your way.

For photos of these tools or links to recommended budget-friendly brands, visit my store at lifestylewithjoi.com.

Here are the 37 essential tools to help you build a high-functioning kitchen:

1. **Chef's Knife (8-inch)**

The ultimate all-purpose chopping, slicing, and dicing knife.

2. **Paring Knife (3-4 inch)**

For small, precise tasks like peeling, hulling strawberries, or mincing garlic.

3. **Bread Knife (Serrated)**

For sawing through bread, tomatoes, and certain hard vegetables without crushing them.

4. **Cutting Board (Large)**

At least one sturdy wood board for all your prep work.

5. **Y-Peeler**

The most efficient type of peeler for vegetables and fruits.

6. **Kitchen Shears**

Heavy-duty scissors for snipping herbs or breaking down poultry.

7. **Cast Iron Skillet (10-12 inch)**

Essential for frying, high-heat searing, achieving deep browning, and cooking on the stovetop or in the oven.

8. **Dutch Oven (5-7 quart, Enameled)**

Perfect for slow-cooking, braising meats, making large batches of soups/stews, deep frying, and baking bread.

9. **Stainless Steel Skillet (10-12 inch)**

A reliable pan for everyday sautéing and achieving sauces (since you can deglaze it easily).

10. **Nonstick Cookware**

Ideal for flipping delicate eggs, searing flaky fish, or simmering sticky sauces.

11. **Baking Sheet (Half Sheet Pan)**

Perfect for roasting vegetables, baking cookies, or cooking sheet-pan dinners.

12. **Oven-Safe Casserole Dish (9x13 inch)**

Necessary for baking lasagna, roasts, and large sheet cakes.

13. **Dry Measuring Cups (Set)**

For flour, sugar, grains, and other solid ingredients.

14. **Liquid Measuring Cups (2-cup)**

For water, milk, oil, and other liquids.

15. **Measuring Spoons (Set)**

For small amounts of spices, extracts, and leavening agents.

16. **Mixing Bowls (Set)**

A nesting set of 3-4 bowls for mixing, prepping, and proofing.

17. **Tongs (Locking)**

For flipping, turning, and general gripping in hot pans.

18. **Silicone Cooking Utensils (Set)**

Heat-resistant, flexible scrapers perfect for batters, folding, and stirring delicate sauces.

19. **Wooden Spoons (Set)**

Durable, heat-safe, and won't scratch your cookware (especially the Dutch oven enamel).

20. **Whisk**

For making salad dressings, whipping cream, and blending batters smoothly.

21. **Colander**

For draining pasta, rinsing beans, or washing produce.

22. **Can Opener (Manual)**

Reliable and necessary for opening canned goods.

23. **Grater**

For coarsely shredding cheese, vegetables, or potatoes.

24. **Citrus Juicer (Handheld)**

Efficiently extracts juice from lemons, limes, and oranges.

25. **Instant-Read Thermometer**

Crucial for safety and accuracy when cooking meat, poultry, or checking the temperature of baked goods.

26. **Garlic Press**

It efficiently crushes whole cloves into a fine mince without requiring peeling or sticky chopping.

27. **Mortar and Pestle**

The best way to grind and crush small batches of whole spices, herbs, or garlic into a paste.

28. **Meat Mallet**

Used to pound meat (i.e., chicken) to a uniform thickness for even cooking, or to break up tough fibers for tenderizing.

29. **Deep Freezer**

A large appliance for deep storage to freeze bulk meat and discounted perishables.

30. **Digital Kitchen Scale**

Measures precise weight for accurate ingredients and verifying unit pricing.

31. **Slow Cooker (or Electric Pressure Cooker)**

Versatile appliance for slow-cooking or quickly tenderizing cheaper cuts of meat and beans.

32. **Vacuum Sealer**

Specialized storage to remove air, portion, and protect bulk-bought food from freezer burn.

33. **Storage Containers**

Nesting, sealable containers for safely storing and organizing batches of leftovers and bulk grains.

34. **Blender (Immersion or Countertop)**

Rapidly mixes and purées ingredients; great for processing vegetable scraps and making homemade sauces.

35. **Food Processor**

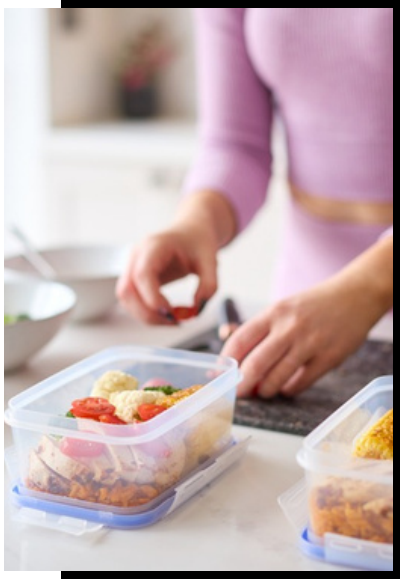
Quickly chops, slices, or shreds large quantities of ingredients to reduce prep time for whole foods.

36. **Reusable Produce Bags**

Durable bags to carry produce and bulk items; aids in organizing and accurate weighing.

37. **Vegetable Brush**

A bristled brush to scrub root vegetable skins, allowing you to use the nutrient-rich skin.



50 DINNER
RECIPES &
GROCERY
LISTS

Thrive Kitchen

These 50 recipes are more than just meals; they are your roadmap for the week. Use them to guide your weekly meal plan and align your spending.

While stocking your pantry might require an initial investment, remember that these staples work across multiple dishes.

Don't be afraid to get creative. Swap spices, use what's on hand, add ingredients to the grocery list, and make every plate your own.

You aren't just saving money; you're embracing the art of living well on your own terms.

Beef & Broccoli

Cost	Servings	Prep Time	Cook Time
$15-$40	**3**	35 mins	10 mins

Ingredients

- 3/4 lb. (12 oz) top sirloin, cut into 1/8-inch thick strips (slice against the grain)
- 1 lb. broccoli, cut into florets
- 1/3 cup oyster sauce
- 2 tsp Asian (toasted) sesame oil
- 1/3 cup Shaoxing Rice Wine
- 1/4 cup beef broth (low-sodium) or water
- 1 tsp soy sauce
- 1 tsp white sugar
- 1 tsp cornstarch
- 3 tbsp vegetable oil, plus more if needed
- 1 tbsp Fresh ginger, minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- Sesame seeds (for garnish, optional)

Directions

1. Whisk together the oyster sauce, sesame oil, Shaoxing wine, beef broth, soy sauce, sugar, and cornstarch. Add the beef and marinate for 30 minutes in the fridge.
2. Heat 2 tbsp of oil in a wok/skillet over medium-high. Add broccoli and 2 tbsp of water; cover for 1 minute to steam, then stir-fry until tender-crisp (about 4 mins total). Remove broccoli and set aside.
3. Add the remaining 1 tbsp of oil. Toss in the minced garlic and ginger for just 10 seconds until fragrant. Add the beef and all its marinade. Stir-fry for 3 to 5 minutes.
4. Return the broccoli to the pan and toss to coat in the sauce for 1 minute.
5. Serve immediately with rice and garnish with sesame seeds if desired.

Beef & Broccoli

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Oyster Sauce: 1 bottle
- Shaoxing Rice Wine: 1 bottle
- Asian Sesame Oil: 1 bottle
- Beef Broth: 1 carton
- Soy Sauce: 1 bottle
- White Sugar: 1 bag
- Cornstarch: 1 container
- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- Rice: 1 bag
- Sesame Seeds: 1 jar

Protein

- Top Sirloin: 3/4 lb. (12 oz)

Produce

- Broccoli: 1 lb. (2 large heads)
- Fresh Ginger: 1 small knob
- Garlic: 1 bulb

Butter Chicken

Cost: $16-$35 **Servings:** 4-5 **Prep Time:** 15-20 mins **Cook Time:** 25-30 mins

Ingredients

- 4 (1 1/2 lbs.) chicken breasts, cut in chunks
- 1/2 cup butter (1 stick), divided
- 1 onion, minced
- 1 tbsp garlic, minced
- 1 (15 oz) can tomato sauce
- 1-1 1/2 cups heavy cream
- 2 tsp salt
- 1/2-1 tsp cayenne pepper (optional)
- 1 tsp garam masala
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 tbsp tandoori masala
- 1 tbsp tomato paste (optional, for a deeper orange color)

Directions

1. Preheat your oven to 400°F. Toss the chicken chunks with the oil and tandoori masala.
2. Spread the chicken on a baking sheet. Bake for 10 minutes. *Note: The chicken might still be slightly pink in the very center. It will finish cooking in the sauce.*
3. While the chicken bakes, melt 4 tbsp (1/2 stick) of the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Sauté the onion and garlic for about 15 minutes. You want them a deep golden brown.
4. To the onions, add the remaining butter, the tomato sauce, tomato paste (if using), salt, cayenne, and garam masala. Stir well and simmer for about 5 to 8 minutes.
5. Stir in the heavy cream. Bring it to a very gentle simmer.
6. Add the baked chicken chunks into the sauce. Simmer everything together for 5 minutes.
7. Serve over basmati rice with naan bread.

Butter Chicken

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Butter: 1 box
- Heavy Cream: 1 quart
- Tomato Sauce: 1 (15 oz) can
- Tandoori Masala: 1 jar
- Garam Masala: 1 jar
- Cayenne Pepper: 1 jar
- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- Salt: 1 canister
- Tomato Paste: 1 tube
- Basmati Rice: 1 bag
- Naan Bread: 1 package

Protein

- Chicken Breasts: 1 1/2 lbs. (3–4)

Produce

- Onion: 1 large
- Garlic: 1 bulb

Sweet & Sour Pork

Cost: $13-$25

Servings: 3-4

Prep Time: 25-30 mins

Cook Time: 15-22 mins

Main Ingredients:

- 1 lb. boneless pork loin, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 2/3 cup packed brown sugar
- 2/3 cup apple cider vinegar
- 2/3 cup ketchup
- 2 tsp soy sauce
- 3-4 tbsp vegetable oil, for frying
- 1 medium onion, cut into chunks
- 2 medium carrots, thinly sliced
- 1 medium red or green bell pepper, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1/2 tsp garlic, minced
- 1/4 tsp ground ginger
- 1 (8 oz) can pineapple chunks, drained

For the Coating:

- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup cornstarch
- 1/2 -1 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/4 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten

Directions

1. In a small bowl, combine brown sugar, apple cider vinegar, ketchup, soy sauce, and ground ginger. Mix well and set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, cornstarch, salt, and pepper. In a separate bowl, beat the egg. Toss the pork in the flour, then dip it in the egg, and toss it in the flour again for a double coating.
3. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches (don't overcrowd!), fry the pork for 5 to 7 minutes, until golden brown and crispy. Drain on a paper towel-lined plate.
4. Add a little more oil to the skillet and sauté the onion, carrots, bell pepper, and garlic for 3 to 5 minutes until tender-crisp.
5. Pour the sauce (from step 1) into the skillet with the vegetables and bring to a boil, stirring for 1 minute until it thickens slightly. Stir in the pineapple, then add the pork back to the skillet and toss to coat.
6. Serve over rice.

Sweet & Sour Pork

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Pineapple Chunks: 1 (8 oz) can
- Apple Cider Vinegar: 1 bottle
- Brown Sugar: 1 bag
- Ketchup: 1 bottle
- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- All-Purpose Flour: 1 bag
- Cornstarch: 1 container
- Ground Ginger: 1 jar
- Soy Sauce: 1 bottle
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Rice: 1 bag

Protein

- Boneless Pork Loin: 1 lb.
- Egg: 1 carton (1 large)

Produce

- Onion: 1 medium
- Carrots: 2 medium
- Bell Pepper: 1 medium (Green or Red)
- Garlic: 1 bulb

Blackened Lemon Pepper Salmon

Cost: $25-$65 **Servings:** 4 **Prep Time:** 5-7 mins **Cook Time:** 12-15 mins

Main Ingredients:

- 4 salmon fillets (about 6 oz each, skin on or off)
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil (for the pan)
- 3 tbsp unsalted butter, melted
- 3 tbsp fresh lemon juice
- 1 1/2 tsp fresh parsley, chopped
- 3/4 tsp garlic powder
- 3/4 tsp salt, or to taste
- 3/4 tsp ground black pepper, or to taste
- 1-1 1/2 tbsp whole black peppercorns, coarsely crushed, or to taste

For the Sauce:

- 3 tbsp unsalted butter
- 3-4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 2 tbsp fresh lemon juice
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Pat the salmon bone-dry with paper towels.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together the melted butter, lemon juice, parsley, garlic powder, salt, black pepper, and the crushed peppercorns. Set aside.
3. Heat the oil in an oven-safe skillet over medium-high heat. Once the oil is shimmering, place salmon in the pan (skin-side up). Sear for only 60–90 seconds until a dark crust forms.
4. Flip the fillets so they are skin-side down. Spoon the butter mixture over the top of each fillet. Transfer the skillet immediately to the oven.
5. The salmon will cook around 8-10 minutes or more. Use an instant-read thermometer in the thickest part of the fish until it reaches 145°F. For a more tender finish, pull them at 135°F and rest for 5 minutes.
6. While baking, melt 3 tbsp butter in a saucepan and sauté garlic for 1 minute. Add heavy cream and simmer on low for 3 minutes until thickened. Turn off the heat. Stir in lemon juice, salt, and pepper.
7. Serve the salmon hot, drizzled with the sauce and your favorite sides.

Blackened Lemon Pepper Salmon

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Unsalted Butter: 1 box
- Heavy Cream: 1 pint
- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Garlic Powder: 1 jar
- Black Peppercorns: 1 jar
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Salt: 1 canister

Protein

- Salmon Fillets: 4 (6 oz. pieces)

Produce

- Lemon: 2 large
- Garlic: 1 bulb
- Fresh Parsley: 1 bunch

Stuffed Bell Peppers

Cost	Servings	Prep Time	Cook Time
$17-$30	4	20 mins	43-55 mins

Ingredients

- 1 lb. lean ground beef
- 4 medium bell peppers (any color), halved lengthwise and seeded
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 (14.5 oz) can crushed tomatoes
- 1/2 cup cooked rice
- 1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce (optional, for depth)
- 1/2-1 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/2-1 tsp ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup beef broth
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese, divided
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Directions

1. Preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C). Grease a 9x13 inch baking dish. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Blanch the pepper halves for 3 to 5 minutes until slightly tender. Drain them and set aside.
2. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook for 5 to 7 minutes until soft and translucent. Add the garlic and cook for 1 more minute until fragrant.
3. Increase the heat to medium-high. Add the ground beef to the onions and garlic. Cook and crumble until no longer pink. Drain any excess fat.
4. Remove the skillet from heat. Stir in the crushed tomatoes, cooked rice, parsley, oregano, Worcestershire sauce, salt, and pepper. Taste a small spoonful and adjust salt and pepper if needed.
5. Arrange the blanched peppers in the baking dish, open-side up. Spoon the beef mixture evenly into each half. Pour the beef broth into the bottom of the dish (not over the peppers). Cover the dish loosely with foil. Bake for 30 minutes.
6. Remove the foil. Sprinkle 3/4 cup of the mozzarella and all of the Parmesan over the tops. Bake uncovered for another 10 to 15 minutes until the cheese is bubbly and slightly golden.
7. Let stand for 5 minutes. Top with the remaining 1/4 cup mozzarella cheese, if desired.

Stuffed Bell Peppers

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Crushed Tomatoes: 1 (14.5 oz) can
- Rice: 1 bag
- Dried Oregano: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Beef Broth: 1 carton
- Mozzarella Cheese: 8 oz
- Parmesan Cheese: 1 container

Protein

- Lean Ground Beef: 1 lb.

Produce

- Bell Peppers: 1 bag (4 medium)
- Yellow Onion: 1 medium
- Garlic: 1 bulb
- Fresh Parsley: 1 bunch

Creamy Chicken Marsala

Cost: $16-$42
Servings: 4
Prep Time: 15-20 mins
Cook Time: 25-30 mins

Ingredients

- 4 (1 1/2 lb.) chicken breasts
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp unsalted butter
- 2 cups fresh mushrooms (packaged), sliced
- 1 tsp salt, for the chicken, plus more for the sauce, to taste
- 1 tsp ground black pepper, for the chicken, plus more for the sauce
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1/4 cup Marsala wine or substitute
- 1-1 1/2 cups of heavy cream
- 1/4 cup milk

Directions

1. Cover the chicken with a layer of Saran wrap, then use the bottom of a heavy skillet or mallet to pound it to an even 1/2-inch thickness.
2. Thinly slice the chicken or cut it in half. Season both sides of the chicken with the salt, pepper, onion powder, and garlic powder.
3. In a large skillet, heat olive oil and butter over medium-high heat. Sauté the chicken for 3 to 5 minutes per side until golden brown and cooked through. Remove from the skillet and set aside.
4. In the same skillet, sauté the mushrooms until tender. Add Marsala wine, scraping up any browned bits, and boil for 2 to 4 minutes until the wine reduces slightly.
5. Reduce the heat to low. Stir in the heavy cream and milk. Simmer for 5 to 7 minutes until the sauce thickens. Season the sauce, to taste, with additional onion powder, garlic powder, salt, and pepper.
6. Return the chicken to the skillet, spooning the sauce over it. Simmer for 1 to 2 minutes to heat through.
7. Serve immediately over pasta, rice, or mashed potatoes.

Creamy Chicken Marsala

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Unsalted Butter: 1 box
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Onion Powder: 1 jar
- Garlic Powder: 1 jar
- Marsala Wine: 1 bottle
- Heavy Cream: 1 carton
- Milk: 1 carton

Protein

- Chicken Breasts: 1 pack (1 1/2 lb.)

Produce

- Fresh Mushrooms: 1 (8 oz) package

Mustard Glazed Pork Chops

Cost: $15-$45
Servings: 4
Prep Time: 10 mins
Cook Time: 20-25 mins

Main Ingredients:

- 4 bone-in or boneless pork chops, about 3/4-inch thick
- 2 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 1 tbsp ground mustard
- 1 tsp seasoned salt, or to taste
- 1/2 tsp black pepper
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil

For the Sauce:

- 2 tsp ground mustard
- 1 cup chicken broth (low-sodium)
- 1/2 cup medium onion, chopped
- 2 tbsp ketchup
- 2 tbsp orange marmalade
- 1 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tbsp Dijon mustard

Directions

1. 1. In a shallow bowl, whisk together the flour, 1 tablespoon ground mustard, seasoned salt, and pepper. Coat each pork chop in the flour mixture, ensuring it's evenly coated.
2. Heat the oil in a cast iron or large skillet over medium heat. Add the coated pork chops and brown them on both sides for about 8 minutes total. Once browned, remove the chops from the skillet and set them aside on a plate.
3. Add the chopped onions directly into the skillet (use the leftover oil/pork fat). Sauté for 2 to 3 minutes until softened and translucent. While the onions are softening, prepare the sauce in a separate bowl: whisk together the 2 teaspoons ground mustard, chicken broth, ketchup, orange marmalade, soy sauce, and Dijon mustard until well combined.
4. Pour the mustard sauce into the skillet with the sautéed onions. Stir to scrape up any browned bits from the pan, then place the pork chops back into the sauce.
5. Reduce heat to low, cover the skillet, and let the pork chops simmer for about 10 to 12 minutes, or until they are tender and cooked through (internal temperature of 145°F). Spoon the mustard sauce over each chop.
6. Serve with mashed potatoes, rice, or pasta.

Mustard Glazed Pork Chops

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- All-Purpose Flour: 1 bag
- Ground Mustard: 1 jar
- Seasoned Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- Ketchup: 1 bottle
- Orange Marmalade: 1 jar
- Soy Sauce: 1 bottle
- Dijon Mustard: 1 jar
- Chicken Broth: 1 carton

Protein

- Pork Chops: 4 count (1 pack)

Produce

- Onion: 1 medium

Shrimp Fajitas

Cost: $19-$22 **Servings:** 3 **Prep Time:** 10-15 mins **Cook Time:** 10-12 mins

Ingredients

- 1 lb. medium shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 1 1/2 tbsp vegetable oil, divided
- 1 medium green bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 1 medium red bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 1 small onion (about 1 cup), thinly sliced
- 1/2-3/4 of a (1.25 oz) taco seasoning packet
- 2 tbsp water, or as needed
- 6 (8 or 10-inch) flour tortillas, warmed
- 1/2 fresh lime, juiced, optional

Directions

1. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Once shimmering, add the peppers and onions. Sauté for 4 to 5 minutes until they have charred edges but still have a "snap." Remove them from the skillet and set aside.
2. Add the remaining 1/2 tablespoon of oil to the same hot skillet. Pat the shrimp dry (this ensures a sear, not a steam). Add shrimp in a single layer. Cook for 90 seconds per side until they turn pink and form a "C" shape. (If they curl into an "O," they are overcooked!)
3. Reduce heat to low. Return the peppers and onions to the skillet.
4. Sprinkle half of the taco seasoning over the mixture and add the 2 tbsp of water. Stir gently for 1 minute until the water turns into a light, silky sauce that coats everything. Taste one shrimp, if it needs more salt/spice, add the rest of the seasoning.
5. Turn off the heat and squeeze the fresh lime juice over everything. This "wakes up" the packaged seasoning.
6. Serve the shrimp immediately in warm flour tortillas with rice or beans.

Shrimp Fajitas

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- Taco Seasoning : 1 (1.25 oz) package
- Flour Tortillas: 1 pack/6 (8 or 10-inch)

Protein

- Medium Shrimp: 1 lb.

Produce

- Green Bell Pepper: 1 medium
- Red Bell Pepper: 1 medium
- Onion: 1 small
- Lime

Glazed Meatloaf

Cost: $13-$27
Servings: 6
Prep Time: 10-15 mins
Cook Time: 60 mins

Main Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 lbs. lean ground beef (or 1 lb.)
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup dried bread crumbs or Panko
- 1-2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/2-1 tsp ground black pepper

For the Glaze:

- 1/3 cup of ketchup
- 2 tbsp brown sugar, packed
- 2 tbsp prepared mustard (yellow or Dijon)

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C). In a large bowl, gently combine ground beef, egg, onion, milk, and bread crumbs. Season with salt and pepper. Be careful not to overmix.
2. Press the mixture into a greased 5x9-inch loaf pan or form a free-form loaf in a 9x13-inch baking dish. In a small bowl, whisk together ketchup, brown sugar, and mustard to make the glaze. Spread the glaze evenly over the top of the meatloaf.
3. Bake for 1 hour, or until the internal temperature reaches 160°F (71°C). Let the meatloaf rest for 5 to 10 minutes before slicing to keep it moist.
4. Serve the meatloaf with mashed potatoes, roasted vegetables, or a side of your choice.

Glazed Meatloaf

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Milk: 1 carton
- Bread Crumbs or Panko: 1 canister
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Ketchup: 1 bottle
- Brown Sugar: 1 bag
- Mustard (Yellow or Dijon): 1 jar

Protein

- Lean Ground Beef: 1 1/2 lbs.
- Egg: 1 carton (1 large)

Produce

- Onion: 1 medium

Creamy White Chicken Chili

Cost: $22-$30 **Servings:** 6 **Prep Time:** 10-15 mins **Cook Time:** 25-30 mins

Ingredients

- 1 Rotisserie Chicken, shredded (discard skin/bones)
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 1/2 (14 oz) cans chicken broth (low-sodium)
- 2 (15.5 oz) cans Great Northern beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (4 oz) can diced green Chile peppers (fire-roasted, optional)
- 1 (15 oz) can corn, drained
- 1 tbsp ground cumin
- 1 tbsp chili powder
- 1 tsp cayenne pepper
- Salt, to taste
- 1/2 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 (8 oz) container sour cream
- 1/2 cup heavy whipping cream
- 1 (8 oz) package Monterey Jack cheese, shredded, optional

Directions

1. Heat oil in a Dutch oven over medium heat. Sauté the onion for 3 to 5 minutes until soft.
2. Add the drained beans. Before adding liquid, use a potato masher or a fork to crush about 1/2 cup of the beans directly in the pot.
3. Stir in the broth, green chilies, corn, shredded chicken, cumin, chili powder, cayenne, and black pepper.
4. Bring to a boil, then drop to a simmer. Cover and cook for 15 minutes.
5. Turn the heat to low. In a small bowl, whisk the sour cream and heavy cream together. Stir in one ladle of the hot chili broth to warm the cream (this prevents curdling), then pour the mixture into the pot. Stir on low for 5 minutes until thickened.
6. Stir in half of the Monterey Jack cheese until melted. Save the rest for topping the bowls.

Creamy White Chicken Chili

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Chicken Broth: 2 (14 oz) cans
- Great Northern Beans: 2 (15.5 oz) cans
- Chopped Green Chilies: 1 (4 oz) can
- Corn: 1 (15 oz) can
- Ground Cumin: 1 jar
- Chili Powder: 1 jar
- Cayenne Pepper: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Sour Cream: 1 (8 oz) container
- Heavy Whipping Cream: 1 carton
- Monterey Jack Cheese: 8 oz

Protein

- Rotisserie Chicken: 1 fully cooked

Produce

- Onion: 1 medium
- Fresh Cilantro: 1 bunch

Cost
$7-$18

Servings
4-6

Prep Time
20-25 mins

Cook Time
50-58 mins

Beef Pot Pie

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups cooked seasoned beef, diced (leftover pot roast or steak)
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1/2 cup small yellow onion, diced
- 1-2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 cups cooked medium potatoes, diced
- 1 (10 oz) package frozen mixed vegetables, thawed (peas, carrots, corn, green beans)
- 1 (10.5 oz) can condensed cream of mushroom soup
- 1/2 cup beef broth (low-sodium)
- 2 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp dried thyme leaves, crushed
- 1/2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/2 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 refrigerated ready-to-bake pie crust (14.1 oz package)
- 1 large egg, beaten (for an egg wash)

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C) and let the refrigerated pie crust sit at room temperature for about 15 minutes.
2. In a medium saucepan, heat olive oil over medium heat. Cook diced onion until translucent for 3 to 5 minutes, then add garlic for 1 more minute. Sprinkle in flour and cook for 1 minute. Gradually whisk in the mushroom soup and beef broth until smooth. Simmer for 3 minutes until thick. Stir in Worcestershire sauce, thyme, salt, and pepper.
3. In a 9-inch deep-dish pie plate, combine diced cooked beef, diced cooked potatoes, and thawed mixed vegetables. Pour the sauce over the mixture and stir to combine. Drape the pie crust over the top. Trim, crimp the edges, and brush with the egg wash.
4. Cut a few small slits in the center for steam to escape. Bake for 40 to 45 minutes, or until the filling is bubbly and the crust is golden brown.
5. Let it rest for 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

Beef Pot Pie

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Frozen Mixed Vegetables: 1 (10 oz) bag
- Condensed Cream of Mushroom Soup: 1 (10.5 oz) can
- Beef Broth: 1 carton
- All-Purpose Flour: 1 bag
- Worcestershire Sauce: 1 bottle
- Dried Thyme: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Refrigerated Pie Crust: 1 (14.1 oz) package

Protein

- Seasoned Beef (Pot Roast or Steak): 1 1/2 cups
- Egg: 1 carton (1 large)

Produce

- Yellow Onion: 1 small
- Garlic: 1 bulb
- Potatoes: 2 medium

Teriyaki Pork Tenderloin

Cost: $13-$24 **Servings:** 4-6 **Prep Time:** 10 mins **Cook Time:** 2.5 to 3 hours

Ingredients

- 2 lb. pork tenderloin
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1/2 cup teriyaki sauce
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1/4 cup brown sugar, packed
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 fresh red chili pepper, finely chopped, optional
- 1/2 large onion, sliced
- 1/4 tsp black pepper

Directions

1. Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Pat the pork dry with paper towels. Sear the tenderloin for 10 minutes, turning every couple of minutes until a dark, golden-brown crust forms on all sides.
2. While the pork browns, whisk together the teriyaki sauce, chicken broth, and brown sugar. Stir in the garlic, onion, black pepper, and chili peppers.
3. Transfer the browned pork to the slow cooker. Pour the sauce mixture over the top. Set to LOW.
4. Cook on LOW for 2.5 to 3.5 hours. Flip the pork once or twice during the process. Start checking the internal temperature at 2.5 hours and remove the pork as soon as it hits 145°F.
5. Move the pork to a cutting board and tent it loosely with foil for 10 minutes.
6. Pour the liquid from the slow cooker into a small saucepan. Simmer over medium-high heat for 5 to 7 minutes until it reduces and becomes a thick, sticky glaze.
7. Slice the pork into 1-inch thick medallions and drizzle the thickened glaze generously over the top.
8. Serve with rice, mashed potatoes, or vegetables.

Teriyaki Pork Tenderloin

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Teriyaki Sauce: 1 bottle
- Chicken Broth: 1 carton
- Brown Sugar: 1 bag
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Pork Tenderloin: 2 lb.

Produce

- Red Chili Peppers: 1 small bag
- Onion: 1 large
- Garlic: 1 bulb (4 cloves)

Thai Spicy Chicken Fried Rice

Cost: $17-$38

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 15-20 mins

Cook Time: 6-8 mins

Ingredients

For the Sauce:

- 3 tbsp oyster sauce
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- 2 tbsp fish sauce
- 1 tsp white sugar

For the Stir-Fry:

- 1 lb. chicken breasts, cut into thin strips
- 3 tbsp peanut oil, for frying
- 4 cups (1.5 cups dry) cooked jasmine rice, chilled
- 6 large cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 serrano peppers, crushed (adjust to your spice preference)
- 1 medium red bell pepper, seeded and thinly sliced
- 1 medium onion, thinly sliced

For the Garnish:

- 1 cucumber, sliced (optional)
- 1/2 cup cilantro sprigs (optional)

Directions

1. In a small bowl, whisk together the oyster sauce, soy sauce, fish sauce, and sugar until well combined. Set aside.
2. Heat the peanut oil in a large wok or a large, sturdy skillet over medium-high heat until it begins to smoke lightly.
3. Add garlic and serrano peppers, then immediately add chicken, onions, and bell peppers. Stir-fry for 3 to 5 minutes until chicken is cooked through.
4. Pour in the oyster sauce mixture and continue to stir-fry for an additional minute, ensuring everything is well-coated.
5. Increase the heat to high. Add the chilled jasmine rice. Stir quickly and continuously, tossing the ingredients together, until the sauce is evenly blended with the rice for 2 minutes. Press the rice against the sides of the skillet/ wok for a few seconds at a time to get those toasted "brown bits."
6. Remove from heat and toss in the cilantro so it wilts slightly from the residual heat.
7. Serve with cucumber slices, if desired.

Thai Spicy Chicken Fried Rice

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Jasmine Rice: 1 bag
- Peanut Oil: 1 bottle
- Oyster Sauce: 1 bottle
- Soy Sauce: 1 bottle
- Fish Sauce: 1 bottle
- White Sugar: 1 bag

Protein

- Chicken Breasts: 1 lb.

Produce

- Garlic: 1 bulb
- Serrano Peppers: 1 small bag
- Red Bell Pepper: 1 medium
- Onion: 1 medium
- Cucumber: 1 medium
- Cilantro: 1 bunch

Cost: $14-$23

Servings: 4-5

Prep Time: 15-20 mins

Cook Time: 2-3 hrs

Spaghetti with Meat Sauce

Ingredients

- 1 lb. lean ground beef
- 12 oz spaghetti noodles
- 1 tbsp white sugar, or to taste
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1-2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/2-1 tsp ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp dried minced onion
- 1 (28 oz) can crushed tomatoes
- 1 (6 oz) can tomato paste
- 1/2 cup beef broth (low-sodium)
- 1 (8 oz) fresh mushrooms (package), sliced
- Parmesan cheese, for garnish

Directions

1. In a large pot or Dutch oven, cook the ground beef over medium heat, and break up the meat as it cooks until it's fully browned. Drain off any excess fat.
2. Add the browned beef back to the pot. Stir in the sugar, dried oregano, garlic powder, dried minced onion, crushed tomatoes (with their liquid), tomato paste, and beef broth or water. Season with the salt and ground black pepper. Stir in the mushrooms.
3. Bring the sauce to a gentle simmer, then reduce the heat to low. Cover the pot and let the sauce simmer for at least 2 hours, or up to 3 hours, stirring occasionally.
4. About 15 minutes before the sauce is ready, bring a large pot of heavily salted water to a rolling boil. Add the spaghetti and cook according to package directions until al dente. Drain the cooked spaghetti.
5. Ladle the sauce over the spaghetti and garnish with the Parmesan cheese.

Spaghetti with Meat Sauce

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Spaghetti Noodles: 1 (12 oz) box
- Crushed Tomatoes: 1 (28 oz) can
- Tomato paste: 1 (6 oz) can
- Beef Broth: 1 carton
- White Sugar: 1 bag
- Dried Oregano: 1 jar
- Garlic Powder: 1 jar
- Dried Minced Onion: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Parmesan Cheese: 1 container

Protein

- Lean Ground Beef: 1 lb.

Produce

- Fresh Mushrooms: 1 (8 oz) package

Chicken Tetrazzini

Cost: $23-$52

Servings: 6-8

Prep Time: 10-15 mins

Cook Time: 45-50 mins

Ingredients

- 4 (2 lbs.) chicken breasts, cut into cubes
- 1 lb. regular or thin spaghetti noodles, cooked and drained
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 (8 oz) fresh mushrooms (package), sliced
- 1/4 cup butter, divided + 2 tbsp butter
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 cups heavy cream
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 1/2 cups shredded Mozzarella cheese
- 1 tsp salt, divided
- 1 tsp ground black pepper, divided
- 1-2 tsp garlic powder
- 1-2 tsp onion powder

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Cook the spaghetti according to package directions, then drain it well. Spread the cooked spaghetti evenly in a 9x13-inch baking dish.
2. Season the chicken breasts with 1/2 teaspoon of salt and 1/2 teaspoon of ground black pepper. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the chicken and cook, stirring occasionally, until it is browned on all sides and cooked through. Remove the chicken from the skillet and place it on top of the spaghetti in the baking dish.
3. In the same skillet, melt 1 tablespoon of the butter over medium-high heat. Add the mushrooms and cook for 5 to 8 minutes, stirring occasionally, until they are tender and lightly browned. Remove from heat and set aside.
4. In a medium saucepan, melt the remaining 3 tablespoons of butter plus the 2 extra tablespoons. Whisk in the flour and cook for 1 to 2 minutes. Pour in the chicken broth while whisking constantly. Let it come to a gentle simmer and thicken up.
5. Turn the heat to low. Whisk in the garlic powder and onion powder. Stir in the heavy cream and the Parmesan cheese. Finally, stir in the sautéed mushrooms, and add the remaining salt and pepper to taste. Let it cook on low for 2 minutes or more until the cream sauce thickens.
6. Pour the mushroom mixture evenly over the spaghetti and chicken in the baking dish. Use a fork to gently lift and mix everything together. Sprinkle the shredded Mozzarella cheese generously over the top.
7. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or until the casserole is bubbly around the edges and the cheese is melted and lightly golden. Let the casserole stand for a few minutes before serving.

Chicken Tetrazinni

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Spaghetti: 1 (1 lb.) box
- Heavy Cream: 1 (32 oz) quart
- Parmesan Cheese: 1 container
- Mozzarella Cheese: 16 oz
- Chicken Broth: 1 (16 oz) carton
- Butter: 1 box
- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Garlic Powder: 1 jar
- Onion Powder: 1 jar
- All-Purpose Flour: 1 bag

Protein

- Chicken Breasts: 2 lbs.

Produce

- Fresh Mushrooms: 1 (8 oz) package

Beef Pot Roast

Cost: $41-$49

Servings: 6-8

Prep Time: 25-35 mins

Cook Time: up to 4 hrs

Main Ingredients

- 4 lbs. boneless chuck roast
- 2 tsp vegetable oil
- 1-2 cups beef broth
- 1-3 cups carrots, sliced diagonally (about ½ inch thick)
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1 tbsp ground black pepper

For the Broth Gravy:

- 2 tbsp fat drippings (from the pot roast)
- 2 cups beef broth or bouillon
- 2 tbsp cornstarch
- 1/4 cup cold water
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 325°F (165°C).
2. Season the meat with salt and pepper. Heat a Dutch oven or oven-safe pot with oil over medium-high heat and sear all sides of the meat for 3 to 4 minutes each. Remove and set aside.
3. Add onion, garlic, and carrots to the pan, seasoning with salt and pepper. Pour in broth and scrape up any browned bits from the bottom.
4. Return the meat to the pot, cover it, and place it in the oven. Cook for 30 minutes at 325°F (165°C). Reduce the heat to 300°F (150°C) and cook for another 2.5-3.5 hours, until tender.
5. Remove from oven. Transfer roast to a platter, tent with foil, and let rest for 10 to 15 minutes.
6. While the roast rests, bring the pan drippings and broth to a boil over medium heat. Whisk in a smooth mixture of cornstarch and water. Boil for 1 minute, stirring constantly, and season with salt and pepper.
7. Slice or shred the pot roast. Serve with the onions, carrots, and gravy over mashed potatoes or rice.

Beef Pot Roast

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Beef Broth: 1 (32 oz) carton
- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- Cornstarch: 1 container
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Boneless Chuck Roast: 4 lbs.

Produce

- Carrots: 1 bag
- Onion: 1 large
- Garlic: 1 bulb

Parmesan Crusted Garlic Chicken

Cost: $10-$24 **Servings:** 4 **Prep Time:** 15-20 mins **Cook Time**: 18-25 mins

Ingredients

For the Chicken:

- 4 chicken breasts or tenders (1.5-2 lbs)
- Salt and ground black pepper (to taste)

For the Garlic Butter:

- 4 tbsp butter (1/2 stick)
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2-3 cloves garlic, minced

For the Top Crust:

- 3/4 cup Italian breadcrumbs
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 tsp onion powder

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400°F (175°C). Line a large, flat baking sheet with parchment paper or aluminum foil.
2. Cover the chicken with a layer of Saran wrap, then use the bottom of a heavy skillet or mallet to pound it to an even 1/4-inch thickness. Pat the chicken dry, season with salt and pepper (to taste), and place on the sheet
3. Whisk together breadcrumbs, Parmesan, and onion powder in a shallow dish.
4. Melt butter and olive oil in a small saucepan. Add garlic and cook for 1 minute until fragrant. Do not brown the garlic.
5. Brush a generous layer of the garlic butter over the top of each chicken. Spoon the breadcrumb mixture over the top of the chicken. Use the back of a spoon or your palm to press the crumbs firmly into the meat so they adhere well. Optionally, drizzle a little garlic butter over the top.
6. Bake for 18 to 25 minutes at 400°F or until an internal temperature of 165°F (74°C) is reached. For a deeper golden color, broil for the final 60 seconds, watching closely so the Parmesan doesn't burn.
7. Serve the chicken with your favorite sides like pasta or vegetables.

Parmesan Crusted Garlic Chicken

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Italian Breadcrumbs: 1 container
- Parmesan Cheese: 1 container
- Butter: 1 box
- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Onion Powder: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Chicken Breasts: 1.5–2 lbs.

Produce

- Garlic: 1 bulb

Ground Beef Stroganoff

Cost: $15-$21

Servings: 4-6

Prep Time: 8-12 mins

Cook Time: 15-20 mins

Ingredients

- 1 lb. lean ground beef
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/2 cups fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 2 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 2 (10.5 oz) cans condensed cream of mushroom soup
- 1 3/4 cups beef broth (low-sodium)
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard (optional, but adds tang and depth)
- 1/2 tsp dried thyme
- 1-2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/2-1 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 cup sour cream

Directions

1. In a large skillet or Dutch oven, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Brown ground beef, drain excess grease, and return to the pan.
2. Reduce heat to medium. Add onion and cook 4 to 5 minutes until soft. Add garlic and mushrooms, cooking another 3 to 5 minutes until lightly browned.
3. Sprinkle flour over the mixture and stir for 1 to 2 minutes.
4. Gradually whisk in beef broth until smooth. Stir in mushroom soup, Worcestershire sauce, mustard, and thyme. Season with salt and pepper. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook for 3 to 5 minutes until slightly thickened.
5. Remove from heat and stir in sour cream. Taste and adjust seasoning.
6. Serve over egg noodles, elbow pasta, rice, or potatoes.

Ground Beef Stroganoff

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Cream of Mushroom Soup: 2 (10.5 oz) cans
- Beef Broth: 1 carton
- Sour Cream: 1 container
- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- All-Purpose Flour: 1 bag
- Worcestershire Sauce: 1 bottle
- Dijon Mustard: 1 jar
- Dried Thyme: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Lean Ground Beef: 1 lb.

Produce

- Yellow Onion: 1 medium
- Garlic: 1 bulb
- Fresh Mushrooms: 1 (8 oz) package

Chicken & Broccoli Rice Casserole

Cost: $18-$31

Servings: 6

Prep Time: 20 mins

Cook Time: 35-45 mins

Ingredients

- 3-4 chicken breasts (about 1.5-2 lb.)
- 1 lb. (16 oz) fresh broccoli florets (about 4 cups)
- 1 tbsp olive oil or butter, optional (for cooking chicken)
- 1-2 (10.5 oz) cans condensed cream of mushroom soup (or cream of chicken)
- 1/2 cup chicken broth
- 1 tbsp mayonnaise
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp onion powder
- 1/4 tsp black pepper
- 2 cups (1 cup dry) cooked white rice
- 1-1 1/2 cup sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded

For the Topping:

- 1/2 cup sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 cup buttery crackers, crushed
- 3 tbsp unsalted butter, melted

Directions

1.Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C).
2.Sauté the chicken in the olive oil and cut into bite-sized pieces.
3.Steam broccoli until crisp-tender for 3 to 5 minutes. Drain well.
4. In a large bowl, whisk together the condensed cream of mushroom soup (add the second can if you feel you need more sauce), chicken broth, mayonnaise, garlic powder, onion powder, and black pepper until smooth.
5.Add the chicken, broccoli, and cooked rice to the bowl with the sauce. Add the 1 to 1 1/2 cups of cheese. Fold all ingredients together until evenly combined. Pour mixture into a 9x13 inch baking dish.
6.For the topping, in a small bowl, combine the crushed crackers, melted butter, and remaining 1/2 cup of cheese. Sprinkle evenly over the casserole.
7.Bake for 35 to 45 minutes, until bubbly and the topping is crispy.

Chicken & Broccoli Rice Casserole

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- White Rice: 1 bag
- Cream of Mushroom Soup: 2 (10.5 oz) cans
- Sharp Cheddar Cheese: 8 oz
- Buttery Crackers: 1 box
- Chicken Broth: 1 carton
- Mayonnaise: 1 jar
- Unsalted Butter: 1 box
- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Garlic Powder: 1 jar
- Onion Powder: 1 jar
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Chicken Breasts: 1.5–2 lbs.

Produce

- Broccoli Florets: 1 lb. bag or 2 medium heads

Salmon Croquettes

Cost: $6-$18

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 15-20 mins

Cook Time: 12 mins

Ingredients

- 1 (14.75 oz) can pink salmon, drained, bones removed
- 1/2-3/4 cups plain bread crumbs (adjust as needed)
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1/2 cup medium onion, finely chopped
- 1/4 cup medium bell pepper (any color), finely chopped
- 1 tsp fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2-1 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/2-1 tsp ground black pepper
- Vegetable oil, for frying (enough to coat the pan)

Directions

1. In a large bowl, mix bread crumbs, egg, onion, bell pepper, lemon juice, garlic powder, salt, and pepper.
2. Drain and debone the salmon, then add it to the bowl. Mix well, breaking up the salmon into small pieces using your hands or a fork.
3. Form the mixture into eight 1/2-inch thick patties.
4. Heat 1/2 inch of oil in a large or cast-iron skillet over medium heat.
5. Fry the patties in batches for about 3 minutes per side, until golden brown.
6. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to drain.
7. Serve with tartar sauce, remoulade, or side of choice.

Salmon Croquettes

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Plain Bread Crumbs: 1 canister
- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- Garlic Powder: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Pink Salmon: 1 (14.75 oz) can
- Egg: 1 carton (1 large)

Produce

- Onion: 1 medium
- Bell Pepper: 1 medium
- Lemon: 1 fruit

Slow Cooker Pulled Pork

Cost: $13-$25

Servings: 4-5

Prep Time: 15 mins

Cook Time: 8-10 hrs and 15 mins

Ingredients

- 2 lb. boneless pork roast
- 1 tbsp butter
- 1 tbsp Cajun seasoning
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1/2-1 cup water
- 1 tbsp liquid smoke flavoring
- 1 pack buns
- 1 bottle of barbecue sauce

Directions

1. Melt butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Cut the pork roast into large chunks, season with Cajun seasoning, and brown on all sides. Transfer the pork to a slow cooker.
2. Add onion and crushed garlic to the same skillet. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes, then stir in water and scrape up any browned bits. Pour the mixture over the pork and add the liquid smoke and stir.
3. Cover and cook on LOW for 8 to 10 hours until the meat falls apart when pressed with a fork.
4. Remove the pork to a bowl. Discard most of the liquid in the pot, leaving just a splash. Shred the meat with two forks.
5. Return the shredded meat to the pot and stir in your bottled BBQ sauce. Let it sit in the pot on the "Warm" setting for 15 minutes; this allows the meat to "drink" the sauce so it stays juicy and sticks to the pork.
6. Serve on buns or with classic southern sides.

Slow Cooker Pulled Pork

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Cajun Seasoning: 1 jar
- Liquid Smoke: 1 bottle
- Butter: 1 box
- Buns: 1 pack
- BBQ Sauce: 1 bottle

Protein

- Boneless Pork Roast: 2 lbs.

Produce

- Onion: 1 medium
- Garlic: 1 bulb

Swiss Steak

Cost: $27-$33 **Servings:** 4-6 **Prep Time:** 30-50 mins **Cook Time:** 6.5-8 hrs

Ingredients

- 2 lbs. beef cube steaks
- 2-3 tbsp oil
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced or cut into rings
- 1 large green bell pepper, thinly sliced or cut into rings
- 1 large red bell pepper, thinly sliced or cut into rings
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 (14.5 oz) can diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 (15 oz) can crushed tomatoes
- 1/2 cup beef broth
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1/2 tsp dried thyme

Directions

1. Place each cube steak between two pieces of Saran wrap and pound to 1/2-inch thickness. In a shallow dish, combine flour, paprika, salt, and pepper. Generously coat each steak.
2. Heat olive oil in a skillet or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Brown the steaks on both sides for 2 to 3 minutes per side. Set aside.
3. Reduce the heat to medium-low. Add onion and bell peppers to the same skillet and sauté for 5 to 7 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for an additional minute.
4. Pour in beef broth, Worcestershire sauce, diced tomatoes, crushed tomatoes, oregano, and thyme. Stir and bring to a simmer.
5. Pour the entire sauce and vegetable mixture over the steaks in the slow cooker. Ensure the sauce gets between the meat.
6. Cover and cook on LOW for 6 to 8 hours or until tender.
7. Season the sauce to taste. Serve over mashed potatoes, pasta, or rice.

Swiss Steak

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Diced Tomatoes: 1 (14.5 oz) can
- Crushed Tomatoes: 1 (28 oz) can
- Beef Broth: 1 carton
- All-Purpose Flour: 1 bag
- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Worcestershire Sauce: 1 bottle
- Paprika: 1 jar
- Garlic Powder: 1 jar
- Dried Oregano: 1 jar
- Dried Thyme: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Beef Cube Steaks: 2 lbs.

Produce

- Yellow Onion: 1 large
- Green Bell Pepper: 1 large
- Red Bell Pepper: 1 large
- Garlic: 1 bulb

Creamy Sundried Tomato Chicken

Cost: $19-$31 **Servings:** 4-5 **Prep Time:** 15 mins **Cook Time:** 20-25 mins

Ingredients

For the Sauce:

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter
- 1-2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 small onion, finely chopped (about 1 cup)
- 1/2-1 cup sun-dried tomatoes, packed in oil, drained and cut into strips (reserve 1-2 tablespoons of the oil)
- 1 (1.25 oz) chicken bouillon cube, crumbled
- 1/2 cup chicken broth (low-sodium)
- 1 1/2 cups heavy cream
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

For the Chicken:

- 3-5 chicken breasts (about 1.5-2 lb.)
- 1/2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/2 tsp ground black pepper

Directions

1. Heat olive oil and butter in a large pan over medium-high heat. Season both sides of the chicken breasts with salt and pepper. Add the chicken and cook for 3-4 minutes per side, until golden brown. Remove chicken and set aside on a plate.
2. Reduce the heat to medium. To the same pan (do not drain the drippings), add onion and sauté for 3 to 5 minutes. Add minced garlic, sun-dried tomatoes, and the reserved tomato oil. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes until fragrant.
3. Stir in chicken bouillon and chicken broth. Bring to a simmer for 3 minutes, scraping the bottom of the pan for the brown bits.
4. Reduce heat to medium-low. Whisk in the heavy cream. Let it simmer gently for about 3 to 5 minutes, stirring frequently, until it begins to thicken slightly.
5. Stir in the Parmesan cheese. Continue stirring until the cheese is completely melted and the sauce is smooth.
6. Slice the chicken into strips (or leave them whole) and return them to the pan. Simmer the chicken in the sauce for 4 to 5 minutes. This finishes the cooking process of the chicken absorbing the cream flavor. Add additional salt and pepper only if needed.
7. Serve over pasta, rice, or mashed potatoes.

Creamy Sundried Tomato Chicken

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Sun-Dried Tomatoes: 1 jar
- Heavy Cream: 1 pint
- Parmesan Cheese: 1 container
- Chicken Broth: 1 carton
- Chicken Bouillon: 1 jar
- Unsalted Butter: 1 box
- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Chicken Breasts: 1.5–2 lbs.

Produce

- Onion: 1 small
- Garlic: 1 bulb

Tuna Casserole

Cost: $10-$22 **Servings**: 4 **Prep Time:** 20 mins **Cook Time:** 25-30 mins

Main Ingredients:

- 2 (5 oz) cans tuna in water, drained and flaked
- 6 oz egg noodles (about 3 cups uncooked)
- 1-2 (10.5 oz) can condensed cream of mushroom soup
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 cup frozen green peas, thawed
- 1 (8 oz) fresh mushrooms (packaged), sliced
- 1 tbsp butter
- 1/2 to 1 cup Cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder (optional)
- 1/2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/2 tsp ground black pepper

For the Topping:

- 1/2 to 1 cup cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1/2 cup crushed buttery crackers
- 1 tbsp butter, melted

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F (190°C).
2. Cook the egg noodles according to package directions until al dente. Drain well and set aside.
3. While the noodles cook, in a large skillet over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the sliced mushrooms and cook, stirring occasionally about 5 to 7 minutes. Remove from heat.
4. In a large bowl, stir together the condensed cream of mushroom soup (add the second can if you feel you need more sauce), milk, garlic powder, salt, and pepper until smooth.
5. Add the tuna, thawed peas, sautéed mushrooms, and 1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese to the soup mixture. Stir gently to combine.
6. Fold in the cooked egg noodles until they are evenly coated with the sauce. Taste the mixture and add more salt if needed.
7. Transfer the mixture to a lightly greased 8x8-inch or 9x13-inch baking dish.
8. For the topping, sprinkle shredded cheese over the casserole. In a small bowl, mix crackers with melted butter, and sprinkle over the cheese layer.
9. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or until the casserole is bubbly and heated through, and the topping is golden brown.
10. Allow the casserole to rest for 5 minutes before serving.

Tuna Casserole

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Egg Noodles: 1 (6 oz) bag
- Condensed Cream of Mushroom Soup: 1-2 (10.5 oz) can
- Milk: 1 carton
- Frozen Green Peas: 1 bag
- Butter: 1 box
- Cheddar Cheese: 8 oz
- Garlic Powder: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Buttery Crackers: 1 box

Protein

- Canned Tuna in Water: 2 (5 oz) cans

Produce

- Fresh Mushrooms: 1 (8 oz) package

Chicken Lo Mein

Cost: $15-$28

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 15 mins

Cook Time: 15-20 mins

Main Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 lb. chicken breasts, thinly sliced
- 1 tsp bouillon granules (chicken or vegetable)
- 1/2 cup hot water
- 6 oz uncooked Lo Mein egg noodles
- 1 (8 oz) fresh mushrooms (packaged), sliced
- 1/4 lb. fresh snow peas
- 1 large red bell pepper, cut into thin strips
- 2 medium carrots, cut into thin strips
- 2 green onions, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil, divided
- 2 tsp sesame oil

For the Marinade & Sauce Base:

- 1 tbsp cornstarch
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- 2 tbsp dry sherry or chicken broth

Directions

1. In a large bowl, whisk together the cornstarch, ginger, soy sauce, and sherry until smooth. Add the chicken and toss to coat evenly. Set aside to marinate.
2. In a small bowl, dissolve the bouillon granules in hot water and set aside. Meanwhile, cook the Lo Mein egg noodles according to the package directions. Drain well.
3. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a large nonstick skillet or wok over medium-high heat. Add the mushrooms, snow peas, red pepper, carrots, and green onions. Stir-fry for 3 to 5 minutes, or until the vegetables are crisp-tender. Remove from the heat and set them aside.
4. Add the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil to the same skillet. Add the marinated chicken mixture and stir-fry for 2 to 3 minutes, or until the chicken is no longer pink and is cooked through.
5. Stir the dissolved bouillon into the chicken. Bring the mixture to a boil and cook, stirring constantly, for 1 to 2 minutes, or until the sauce has reached your desired consistency.
6. Return the stir-fried vegetables to the skillet with the chicken and sauce. Add the Lo Mein and sesame oil. Toss everything together until the noodles and vegetables are well coated and heated through, about 1 to 2 minutes more.

Chicken Lo Mein

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Lo Mein Egg Noodles: 1 (6 oz) bag
- Bouillon Granules: 1 jar
- Cornstarch: 1 container
- Ground Ginger: 1 jar
- Soy Sauce: 1 bottle
- Dry Sherry: 1 bottle
- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- Sesame Oil: 1 bottle

Protein

- Chicken Breasts: 1.5 lbs.

Produce

- Fresh Mushrooms: 1 (8 oz) package
- Fresh Snow Peas: 1/4 lb.
- Red Bell Pepper: 1 large
- Carrots: 2 medium
- Green Onions: 1 bunch

Chicken Fried Steak

Ingredients

For the Beef:

- 4 (1/2 lb.) beef cube steaks
- 3 cups vegetable oil, for deep frying

For the Country Gravy:

- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 1/2 to 3 cups whole milk
- 1/2 tsp kosher salt, or to taste
- 1/4-1 tsp ground black pepper

For the Breading:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2-1 tsp kosher salt, or to taste
- 1/2 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 1/2 cups buttermilk
- 1 large egg
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp hot sauce, optional (e.g. Tabasco)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced

Directions

1. Place each cube steak between two pieces of Saran wrap and pound to 1/4-inch thickness. Season both sides lightly with salt and pepper.
2. For the breading:
   - Dish 1 (Dry): Whisk flour, salt, pepper, baking powder, and baking soda.
   - Dish 2 (Wet): Whisk buttermilk, egg, hot sauce, and minced garlic.
3. For the coating, press the steak into the “dry” (flour), then dip into the “wet” (buttermilk), then back into the “dry” (flour). Let the breaded steaks rest on a wire rack for 10 minutes before frying.
4. Heat oil in a large cast-iron or large skillet to 350°F (175°C). Fry steaks in batches for 3 to 4 minutes per side until deep golden brown. Transfer to a wire rack to keep the bottom from getting soggy.
5. Carefully pour off the hot oil into a glass jar, leaving exactly 1/4 cup of oil and the browned bits in the skillet.
   - Whisk in 1/4 cup flour over medium heat for 1 to 2 minutes to cook out the "raw" flour taste (it should look like a light paste).
   - Slowly whisk in the milk. Simmer and stir constantly for 5 to 7 minutes.
   - If it’s too thick, splash in more milk. If too thin, simmer another minute.
   - Stir in the salt and black pepper. Taste and adjust.
6. Serve the gravy over the chicken fried steaks with sides like mashed potatoes or your favorite vegetables.

Cost: $26-$41

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 25-35 mins

Cook Time: 25-35 mins

Chicken Fried Steak

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- All-Purpose Flour: 1 bag
- Milk: 1 carton
- Buttermilk: 1 carton
- Baking Powder: 1 container
- Baking Soda: 1 container
- Hot Sauce: 1 bottle
- Kosher Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Beef Cube Steaks: 4 (2 lbs.)
- Egg: 1 carton (1 large)

Produce

- Garlic: 1 bulb

Pepper Steak

Cost: $19-$29

Servings: 3-4

Prep Time: 20 mins

Cook Time: 10 mins

Ingredients

- 1 lb. beef (flank steak or sirloin), sliced thin against the grain
- 1/4 cup soy sauce, divided
- 1/2 cup beef broth (low-sodium)
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 1 tbsp cornstarch
- 1/2 tsp ground ginger
- 1/2 tsp coarse black pepper
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 medium yellow onion, sliced
- 1 medium green bell pepper, sliced
- 1 medium red bell pepper, sliced
- 3 tbsp vegetable oil, divided

Directions

1. In a medium bowl, toss the sliced beef with 1 tablespoon of the soy sauce and all of the cornstarch. Ensure every piece is coated. Let it sit for 15 minutes at room temperature.
2. In a separate small bowl, whisk together the remaining 3 tbsp soy sauce, beef broth, sugar, ginger, black pepper, and minced garlic. Set aside.
3. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a large skillet or wok over medium-high heat. Add the onion and bell peppers. Cook for 4 to 5 minutes until tender-crisp (or desired tenderness). Transfer them to a plate.
4. Add the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil to the same skillet and turn the heat to high. Once the oil is shimmering, add the beef strips in a single layer. Let them sear undisturbed for 90 seconds to get a crust, then flip and cook for another 1 minute. *Note: Don't overcrowd the pan.*
5. Return the vegetables to the skillet. Give the sauce mixture a quick stir and pour it over the meat and veggies.
6. Stir-fry constantly for about 60 seconds. The cornstarch from the beef and the sauce will activate, creating a glossy, thick glaze.
7. Serve over steamed rice.

Pepper Steak

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Soy Sauce: 1 bottle
- Beef Broth: 1 carton
- Sugar: 1 bag
- Cornstarch: 1 container
- Ground Ginger: 1 jar
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- Rice: 1 bag

Protein

- Beef Flank or Sirloin Steak: 1 lb.

Produce

- Yellow Onion: 1 medium
- Green Bell Pepper: 1 medium
- Red Bell Pepper: 1 medium
- Garlic: 1 bulb

Thai Red Curry Chicken

Cost: $13-$29 **Servings**: 3-4 **Prep Time:** 15 mins **Cook Time:** 15 mins

Ingredients

- 1 lb. chicken breasts, cut into thin strips
- 2 to 3 tbsp Thai red curry paste (adjust to taste)
- 1 (14 oz) can unsweetened coconut milk
- 1 cup medium zucchini, halved and sliced
- 1 red medium bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup large carrots, thinly sliced
- 1 medium onion, quartered and then halved
- 1-2 tbsp palm sugar or brown sugar
- 1/2 tbsp fish sauce (optional, but recommended for authentic flavor)
- 1/2 lime, juiced
- Handful of fresh Thai basil or cilantro

Directions

1. Open the coconut milk without shaking it. Spoon about 3–4 tablespoons of the coconut cream from the top into a large skillet or wok over medium heat. Stir in the red curry paste and cook for 1 to 2 minutes until it smells fragrant and you see tiny droplets of red oil separating from the cream.
2. Add the sliced chicken to the paste mixture. Stir-fry for 2 to 3 minutes until the chicken is coated in the red paste and mostly cooked through.
3. Pour in the rest of the coconut milk, the sugar, and the fish sauce. Bring to a gentle simmer (don't let it "hard boil" or the coconut milk might break).
4. Toss in the carrots and onions first (they take longer), cook for 2 minutes, then add the zucchini and bell peppers. Simmer for another 3 to 4 minutes until the vegetables are "tender-crisp" and the sauce has thickened slightly on its own.
5. Remove from heat. Stir in the lime juice and the fresh herbs. Taste the sauce and adjust seasonings as needed.Serve over steamed rice.

Thai Red Curry Chicken

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Thai Red Curry Paste: 1 jar
- Unsweetened Coconut Milk: 1 (14 oz) can
- Palm Sugar: 1 bag
- Fish Sauce: 1 bottle
- Rice: 1 bag

Protein

- Chicken Breasts: 1 lb.

Produce

- Zucchini: 1 medium
- Red Bell Pepper: 1 medium
- Carrots: 1 large
- Onion: 1 medium
- Thai Basil or Cilantro: 1 bunch
- Lime

Salisbury Steak

Cost	Servings	Prep Time	Cook Time
$12-$28	4	15 mins	25-30 mins

Ingredients

- 1 lb. lean ground beef
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 1/4 cup plain bread crumbs
- 1-2 tsp seasoned salt, or to taste
- 1/2-1 tsp ground black pepper
- 1/2 tsp onion powder
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 cup medium onion, thinly sliced
- 1 (8 oz) fresh mushrooms (packaged), sliced
- 2 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 1 cup beef broth (low-sodium)
- 1 tbsp cooking sherry (optional, for richer flavor)

Directions

1. In a medium bowl, combine the ground beef, egg, bread crumbs, seasoned salt, pepper, onion powder, garlic powder, and Worcestershire sauce. Mix well and form into four oval-shaped patties, about 1/2-inch thick.
2. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet or frying pan over medium-high heat. Place the patties in the pan and cook for 3 to 4 minutes per side, or until browned. Remove the patties from the pan and set them aside on a plate.
3. Reduce the heat to medium. Add the sliced onions and mushrooms to the same skillet. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 to 7 minutes, or until softened.
4. Sprinkle the flour over the onions and mushrooms and stir for 1 minute to cook off the raw flour taste.
5. Slowly whisk in the beef broth and cooking sherry (if using), scraping up any browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Bring the mixture to a simmer, stirring until the gravy thickens.
6. Return the Salisbury steak patties to the skillet, adding them into the gravy. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and let simmer for 10 to 15 minutes, or until the patties are cooked through.
7. Serve immediately with mashed potatoes or rice.

Salisbury Steak

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Plain Bread Crumbs: 1 container
- Seasoned Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Onion Powder: 1 jar
- Garlic Powder: 1 jar
- Worcestershire Sauce: 1 bottle
- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- All-Purpose Flour: 1 bag
- Beef Broth: 1 carton
- Cooking Sherry: 1 bottle

Protein

- Lean Ground Beef: 1 lb.
- Egg: 1 carton (1 large)

Produce

- Onion: 1 medium
- Fresh Mushrooms: 1 (8 oz) package

Orange Chicken

Cost: $11-$26 **Servings**: 3-4 **Prep Time:** 15 mins **Cook Time:** 15 mins

Ingredients

For the Chicken:

- 2 large chicken breasts, cut into 1/2 inch pieces
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup cornstarch
- 1/2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/2 tsp pepper
- 3-4 tbsp vegetable oil

For the Sauce:

- 1 cup water
- 2 tbsp orange juice
- 1 tbsp orange zest, grated
- 1/3 cup rice vinegar
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 2 1/2 tbsp soy sauce
- 1/2 cup brown sugar, packed
- 1/2 tsp fresh ginger root, minced
- 1/2 tsp garlic, minced
- 1/2 tsp red pepper flakes
- 3 tbsp cornstarch
- 2 tbsp water (for cornstarch slurry)

Directions

1. In a saucepan, whisk together the water, orange juice, lemon juice, rice vinegar, soy sauce, brown sugar, ginger, garlic, and red pepper flakes. Bring to a boil, then simmer for 8 to 10 minutes until slightly thickened and concentrated.
2. Pat the chicken pieces completely dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Toss them in a large bag or bowl with the flour and cornstarch until fully coated, shaking off any heavy excess.
3. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Fry the chicken in batches for 3 to 4 minutes per side until deeply golden and crispy. Remove the chicken to a plate and wipe the skillet clean.
4. Pour the simmered sauce into the hot skillet. Once it bubbles, whisk in the cornstarch slurry (the 3 tbsp cornstarch + 2 tbsp water) and stir for about 1 minute until the sauce becomes thick, clear, and glossy.
5. Turn the heat to low, add the chicken and orange zest to the skillet, and toss quickly for 30 seconds until every piece is covered in sauce.
6. Serve immediately over rice and garnish with fresh green onions.

Orange Chicken

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- All-Purpose Flour: 1 bag
- Rice Vinegar: 1 bottle
- Soy Sauce: 1 bottle
- Brown Sugar: 1 bag
- Cornstarch: 1 container
- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- Red Pepper Flakes: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Rice: 1 bag

Protein

- Chicken Breasts: 2 large (1–1.5 lbs.)

Produce

- Orange: 1 medium
- Lemon: 1 medium
- Fresh Ginger Root: 1 small knob
- Garlic: 1 bulb
- Green Onions: 1 bunch

Southern Fried Catfish

Cost	Servings	Prep Time	Cook Time
$27-$39	4-5	20-30 mins	15-20 mins

Main Ingredients:

- 2 lbs. catfish fillets (cut into 3-4 inch pieces)

For the Marinade:

- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 cup water
- 1/2-1 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/2 tsp ground black pepper

For the Coating & Frying:

- 2 cups fine cornmeal
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp seafood seasoning (like Old Bay), or to taste
- 1 1/2-2 quarts vegetable oil, for deep frying (enough to submerge the fish by a few inches)

Directions

1. Whisk together buttermilk, water, salt, and pepper in a bowl. Marinate the catfish for at least 15 to 20 minutes.
2. In a large resealable bag or shallow dish, combine the cornmeal, flour, and seafood seasoning. Shake or whisk well to distribute the spices.
3. Remove a few fillets from the liquid, letting the excess drip off. Toss in the cornmeal mixture to coat thoroughly. Shake off any heavy excess and place the coated fish on a wire rack for 5 to 10 minutes.
4. Fill a heavy pot or Dutch oven halfway with oil. Heat over medium-high until a thermometer reads 365°F (185°C).
5. Carefully add the fish in batches (don't crowd!). The temperature will drop, but aim to keep it between 340°F and 350°F while cooking. Fry for about 2 to 3 minutes per side until golden brown and the fish begins to float.
6. Remove the fish to a wire rack to drain. Wait for the oil to climb back up to 365°F before adding the next batch.
7. Serve with your favorite southern side dishes, such as french fries, coleslaw, hush puppies, or grits.

Southern Fried Catfish

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Buttermilk: 1 carton
- Fine Cornmeal: 1 bag
- All-Purpose Flour: 1 bag
- Seafood Seasoning (Old Bay): 1 tin
- Vegetable Oil: 2 quarts
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Catfish Fillets: 2 lbs.

Produce

Pepperoni Pizza Pasta Bake

Cost	Servings	Prep Time	Cook Time
$23-$29	6-8	15 mins	25 mins

Ingredients

For the Pasta & Sauce:

- 1 lb. ground Italian sausage
- 1 (16 oz) package rotini pasta
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/2 small onion, finely diced
- 1 (24 oz) jar pasta sauce
- 1 tsp white sugar, or to taste

For the Cheese Filling & Topping:

- 1 (15 oz) containers of ricotta cheese
- 1 (12 oz) mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 1/2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/2 tsp ground black pepper
- 2 (3 oz) packages sliced pepperoni

Directions

1. Preheat your oven to 375°F and lightly grease a 9x13-inch baking dish or cast iron skillet.
2. Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil and cook the rotini until under al dente, about 6 to 8 minutes; drain well.
3. While the pasta cooks, brown the Italian sausage, garlic, and onion in a large skillet over medium heat until the meat is no longer pink. Drain or blot the grease with a paper towel.
4. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the ricotta cheese, half of the mozzarella, salt, and pepper until smooth.
5. Fold the cooked pasta, the sausage mixture, the pasta sauce, and the sugar into the ricotta mixture until the noodles are thoroughly coated.
6. Transfer the mixture to the prepared baking dish, topping it with the remaining mozzarella and the pepperoni slices.
7. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes until the cheese is bubbly, optionally broiling for the last 1 to 2 minutes for a crispier top.

Pepperoni Pizza Pasta Bake

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Rotini Pasta: 1 (16 oz) package
- Pasta Sauce: 1 (24 oz) jar
- Ricotta Cheese: 1 (15 oz) container
- Mozzarella Cheese: 12 oz
- White Sugar: 1 bag
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Ground Italian Sausage: 1 lb.
- Sliced Pepperoni: 2 (3 oz) packages

Produce

- Yellow Onion: 1 small
- Garlic: 1 bulb

Cottage Pie

Cost: $12-$30
Servings: 4
Prep Time: 20 mins
Cook Time: 25 mins

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Boil the potatoes (peeled/cubed) in salted water for 15 to 20 minutes. Drain and mash with milk, butter, 1/2 teaspoon salt and pepper. Set aside.
2. Sauté onion in oil. Add ground beef, brown it, and drain grease. Stir in garlic, basil, thyme, paprika, and flour; cook for 1 minute until fragrant.
3. Mix in tomato paste, Worcestershire, and beef broth. Simmer 5 mins until thick, then fold in 1 cup frozen veggies and remaining salt and pepper.
4. Pour the beef mixture into a 2-quart casserole dish. Spread the mashed potatoes over the top, using a fork to create ridges or "peaks." Bake for 15 to 20 minutes. If using cheese, sprinkle it over the top during the last 5 minutes.
5. Let the pie rest for 5 minutes.

Ingredients

- 1 lb. lean ground beef
- 2 large potatoes (about 3-4 cups mashed)
- 1 cup frozen mixed vegetables (peas, carrots, and corn, or green beans)
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- 1/2 tsp smoked paprika
- 1-2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp salt, divided (or to taste)
- 1 tsp ground black pepper, divided
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 1/2 cups beef broth
- 1/4 cup milk or cream
- 2 tbsp butter
- 1 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup Cheddar cheese, shredded (optional, for topping)

Cottage Pie

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Frozen Mixed Vegetables: 1 bag
- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- Beef Broth: 1 carton
- Tomato Paste: 1 can
- Milk or Cream: 1 carton
- Cheddar Cheese: 8 oz
- Dried Basil: 1 jar
- Dried Thyme: 1 jar
- Smoked Paprika: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Worcestershire sauce: 1 bottle
- Butter: 1 box
- All-Purpose Flour: 1 bag

Protein

- Ground Beef (Lean): 1 lb.

Produce

- Potatoes: 2 large
- Onion: 1 large
- Garlic: 1 bulb

Baked Teriyaki Chicken

Cost: $11-$25

Servings: 6

Prep Time: 10 mins

Cook Time: 35 mins

Ingredients

- 12 boneless, skinless chicken thighs (~3 lbs.)
- 1 tbsp cornstarch
- 1 tbsp cold water
- 1/3 cup white sugar
- 1/2 cup soy sauce
- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1-2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/2 tsp ground ginger
- 1/4 tsp ground black pepper

Directions

1. In a saucepan, whisk the cornstarch and cold water until smooth. Stir in sugar, soy sauce, apple cider vinegar, garlic, ginger, and pepper. Simmer over low heat, stirring frequently, until thickened and glossy. Remove from heat.
2. Preheat oven to 425°F. Arrange the boneless chicken thighs in a greased 9x13 dish. Brush a generous layer of the sauce over both sides of the chicken.
3. Bake for 20 minutes. Flip the chicken, brush with more sauce, and bake for another 10 to 15 minutes (until the internal temperature is 165°F). Optional: Broil for the final 2 minutes for a darker, caramelized glaze.
4. Let the chicken rest for 5 minutes, then slice and serve with rice, drizzling any extra pan sauce over the top.

Baked Teriyaki Chicken

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Soy Sauce: 1 bottle
- White Sugar: 1 bag
- Apple Cider Vinegar: 1 bottle
- Cornstarch: 1 container
- Ground Ginger: 1 jar
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Boneless Skinless Chicken Thighs: 3 lbs.

Produce

- Garlic: 1 bulb

Beef Manicotti with Vodka Sauce

Cost: $23-$28
Servings: 4-5
Prep Time: 20 mins
Cook Time: 40 mins

Ingredients

For the Sauce:

- 1 (24 oz) jar Vodka Sauce (use a high-quality brand for best flavor)
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 3 mushrooms, thinly sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1-2 tsp white sugar (optional)
- 1/2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/4 tsp ground black pepper

For the Filling & Shells:

- 1 lb. lean ground beef
- 1/4 tsp Italian seasoning
- 1-2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/2-1 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 (15 oz) ricotta cheese
- 4 (16 oz) cups Italian blend cheese, shredded, divided
- 10 (8 oz) manicotti shells

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C). Boil manicotti shells in lightly salted water for 8 to 10 minutes until al dente. Drain and set aside.
2. Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Cook the onion and mushrooms for 5 to 7 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add garlic and cook for 1 minute. Remove and set aside.
3. To the same skillet, cook and brown the ground beef. Remove the skillet from the heat. Drain excess fat.
4. Filling: To the ground beef, add Italian seasoning, salt, pepper, ricotta, and 1 to 2 cups of cheese.
5. Sauce: In a small saucepan, combine jarred vodka sauce, onion/mushroom mixture, and sugar. Simmer gently over medium-low heat. Taste and adjust salt and pepper.
6. Spoon a thin layer of sauce into the bottom of a large baking dish. Transfer the filling to a piping bag (or a Ziplock bag with the corner snipped) and pipe it into each shell. Arrange shells in a single layer. Pour the remaining sauce over the manicotti to fully cover.
7. Sprinkle with the remaining 1 to 2 cups of cheese. Cover with foil and bake for 30 minutes. Remove the foil and bake for an additional 10 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and the sauce is bubbly.
8. Let cool for a few minutes before serving. This dish pairs with a side salad and garlic bread.

Beef Manicotti with Vodka Sauce

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Manicotti Shells: 1 box
- Vodka Sauce: 1 jar
- Ricotta Cheese: 1 container
- Italian Blend Cheese: 16 oz
- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Italian Seasoning: 1 jar
- White Sugar: 1 bag
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Lean Ground Beef: 1 lb.

Produce

- Onion: 1 small
- Garlic: 1 bulb
- Mushrooms: 1 small package

Shrimp Curry

Cost: $18-$35 **Servings:** 3-4 **Prep Time:** 10 mins **Cook Time:** 20 mins

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 lb. medium shrimp, peeled and de-veined
- 3 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 medium-large onion, chopped
- 7-8 fresh curry leaves
- 2 1/4 tsp ginger garlic paste
- 3/4 tsp ground coriander
- 1/2 tsp salt, to taste
- 1/4 tsp ground turmeric
- 3/4 of a large tomato, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 3/4 tsp ground red Chile pepper, to taste
- 1/2-1 cup water
- 3/4 tsp garam masala
- Fresh cilantro, chopped, to taste

Directions

1. Heat the oil in a large saucepan or wok over medium-high heat. Add the chopped onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until it turns golden brown and softens, about 5 to 7 minutes.
2. Stir in the fresh curry leaves, ginger garlic paste, ground coriander, salt, and turmeric. Cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly, until the spices have melded.
3. Add the finely chopped tomato, tomato paste, and red Chile pepper to the pan. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes, stirring constantly until the tomatoes and paste break down and form a thick, deep-red base.
4. Add the shrimp and water to the pan (add water based on how much sauce you want). Stir to combine everything. Reduce the heat to medium and cook for 3 to 5 minutes, until the shrimp turn pink and are cooked through. Be careful not to overcook them, as they will become tough and dry.
5. Remove the pan from the heat. Stir in the garam masala. Taste the curry and add more salt or chili powder if needed.
6. Garnish with fresh cilantro and serve with basmati rice or naan.

Shrimp Curry

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Vegetable: 1 bottle
- Tomato Paste: 1 can
- Ground Coriander: 1 jar
- Ground Turmeric: 1 jar
- Ground Red Chile Pepper: 1 jar
- Garam Masala: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister

Protein

- Medium Shrimp: 1 1/2 lb.

Produce

- Onion: 1 medium-large
- Tomato: 1 large
- Ginger Garlic Paste: 1 jar
- Fresh Curry Leaves: 1 sprig
- Fresh Cilantro: 1 bunch

Sweet & Spicy Pork Spare Ribs

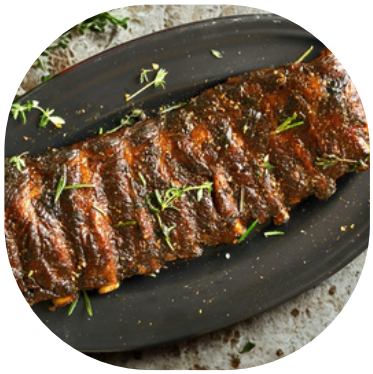
Cost : $17-$35	**Servings:** 3-4	**Prep Time:** 15 mins	**Cook Time:** 180 mins

Ingredients

- 1 rack pork spareribs
- 1 tbsp kosher salt, or to taste
- 1 tbsp ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 2 tsp fresh ginger root, grated
- 1/4 tsp cayenne pepper, to taste
- 1/4 tsp ground cloves
- 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp paprika
- Zest and juice of 2 limes
- 1 cup orange juice

Directions

1. Preheat your oven to 300°F (175°C).
2. In a small bowl, combine the brown sugar, ginger, cayenne, cloves, cinnamon, paprika, salt, pepper, and lime zest.
3. Place the ribs in a glass baking dish. Remove the “silverskin” (the thin membrane on the back of the ribs). Rub the spice mixture all over the ribs, ensuring they are well-coated.
4. In a separate bowl, mix the lime juice and orange juice. Pour the juice mixture over the ribs in the baking dish.
5. Cover the dish tightly with foil and bake for 2 1/2 hours.
6. Remove foil. Increase heat to 375°F. Baste the ribs with the pan juices and bake uncovered for 15 to 20 minutes until the sauce is sticky and the ribs are browned.
7. Serve with barbecue sauce or your favorite sides.



Sweet & Spicy Pork Spare Ribs

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Orange Juice: 1 carton
- Brown Sugar: 1 bag
- Kosher Salt: 1 box
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Paprika: 1 jar
- Ground Cinnamon: 1 jar
- Ground Cloves: 1 jar
- Cayenne Pepper: 1 jar

Protein

- Pork Spareribs: 1 rack

Produce

- Lime: 2 large
- Ginger Root: 1 small piece

Spicy Chicken Stir-Fry

Cost: $14-$27

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 20 mins

Cook Time: 15-20 mins

Ingredients

- 1 lb. chicken breasts, strips or cubes
- 6 tbsp vegetable oil, divided
- 2 tbsp soy sauce, divided
- 3 tsp cornstarch, divided
- 1/2 tsp crushed red pepper flakes
- 1 (8 oz) mushrooms, packaged
- 1 medium red bell pepper, sliced
- 1 lb. broccoli florets
- 1 1/2 cups large onion, sliced
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 1/2 cups chicken broth
- 1/2 tsp ground ginger

Directions

1. Whisk one tablespoon of oil, 1 tablespoon of soy sauce, and 1 teaspoon of cornstarch in a medium bowl. Toss with chicken and marinate in the fridge for 15 minutes.
2. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a wok or large skillet over medium-high heat. Stir-fry the marinated chicken and red pepper flakes for 5 minutes until cooked. Remove and set aside.
3. Wipe the skillet if needed and add the remaining oil. Stir-fry broccoli florets and onions for 3 minutes or until tender. Add red bell pepper and mushrooms; cook for 3 more minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook for just 30 to 60 seconds until fragrant.
4. In a separate bowl, whisk together the chicken broth, ground ginger, and the remaining soy sauce and cornstarch until smooth.
5. Pour the sauce into the skillet. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly, and cook for about 2 minutes until the sauce has thickened.
6. Return the cooked chicken to the skillet and stir to coat. Cook for another minute to heat through.
7. Serve with rice.

Spicy Chicken Stir-Fry

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Chicken Broth: 1 carton
- Vegetable Oli: 1 bottle
- Soy Sauce: 1 bottle
- Cornstarch: 1 container
- Crushed Red Pepper Flakes: 1 jar
- Ground Ginger: 1 jar
- Rice: 1 bag

Protein

- Chicken Breasts: 1 lb.

Produce

- Broccoli Florets: 1 lb.
- Red Bell Pepper: 1 medium
- Onion: 1 large
- Fresh Mushrooms: 1 (8 oz) package
- Garlic: 1 bulb

Mongolian Beef

Cost: $16-$31 **Servings:** 4 **Prep Time**: 10 mins **Cook Time:** 10 mins

Ingredients

- 1 lb. beef flank steak
- 1/4 cup cornstarch
- 1/3 cup + 2 tsp vegetable oil, for frying
- 1 tbsp garlic, finely chopped
- 1/2 tsp fresh ginger root, grated
- 1/2 cup soy sauce
- 1/4 cup water
- 1/4 cup dark brown sugar, to taste
- 1 small onion, sliced
- 2 green onions, thinly sliced

Directions

1. Thinly slice steak against the grain. Toss with cornstarch in a bowl; let sit for 10 minutes.
2. Heat 2 teaspoons of oil in a small pan. Cook garlic and ginger for 30 seconds. Add soy sauce, water, and brown sugar. Boil for 4 minutes on medium-high until slightly thickened. Remove and set aside.
3. Heat 1/3 cup of oil in a deep skillet or wok to 375°F. Working in batches, shake excess cornstarch from the beef and fry for about 2 minutes until crispy and brown. Drain on paper towels.
4. Drain oil from the pan, and return to medium heat. Add the onion and cook for 1 to 2 minutes until they begin to soften. Add fried beef and reserved sauce. Stir briefly. Add the green onions and stir for about 2 minutes, until they are softened.
5. Serve over rice or with vegetables.

Mongolian Beef

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- Cornstarch: 1 container
- Soy Sauce: 1 bottle
- Dark Brown Sugar: 1 bag
- Rice: 1 bag

Protein

- Beef Flank Steak: 1 lb.

Produce

- Onion: 1 small
- Green Onions: 1 bunch
- Garlic: 1 bulb
- Ginger Root: 1 small piece

Cost: $15-$27
Servings: 4
Prep Time: 10 mins
Cook Time: 30 mins

Pesto Chicken Florentine

Ingredients

- 4 chicken breasts, cut into strips
- 1-2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/2-1 tsp ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 cups fresh spinach leaves, finely chopped
- 1 (4.5 oz) package dry Alfredo sauce mix
- 2 tbsp pesto
- 1 (8 oz) package dry penne pasta
- 1 tbsp Romano cheese, grated

Directions

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook the penne pasta until al dente, about 8 to 10 minutes and drain.
2. While the pasta is cooking, heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Season the chicken strips with salt and pepper, then add them to the skillet. Cook for 7 to 8 minutes, or until cooked through and no longer pink.
3. Add 2 cups chopped spinach to the skillet. Sauté for 2 minutes until wilted. Add garlic and cook for 1 more minute.
4. Prepare the Alfredo sauce according to the package directions. Once the sauce is ready, stir in the pesto.
5. Lower the skillet heat to medium-low. Add the cooked pasta and the pesto-Alfredo sauce directly into the skillet with the chicken. Toss well. (If it's too thick, add a splash of that reserved pasta water).
6. Serve topped with grated Romano cheese.

Pesto Chicken Florentine

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Penne Pasta: 1 box
- Dry Alfredo Sauce Mix: 1 (4.5 oz) packet
- Pesto Sauce: 1 jar
- Romano Cheese: 1 container
- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Chicken Breasts: 4 large

Produce

- Fresh Spinach: 1 bag
- Garlic: 1 bulb

Roasted Garlic Sirloin Steak

Cost: $30-$42

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 10 mins

Cook Time: 25 mins

Ingredients

- 2 lb. top sirloin steak, cut into four equal pieces
- 1 tbsp kosher salt, or to taste
- 1/2-1 tsp ground black pepper
- 15 cloves of garlic
- 1/2 cup olive oil plus 1 tbsp for roasting the garlic

Directions

1. Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C).
2. Arrange the garlic cloves on a baking sheet and drizzle with 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Roast for 15 to 20 minutes, or until the cloves are golden brown and soft. Stir them once to ensure even cooking. Let the garlic cool slightly.
3. Place the cooled garlic cloves and the remaining olive oil in a food processor. Blend until you have a smooth, paste-like consistency.
4. Pat the sirloin steaks dry with a paper towel. Season them generously with kosher salt and pepper on both sides.
5. Heat a cast iron or large skillet over medium to high heat. Add the steaks and cook for about 3-4 minutes per side. For Medium-Rare, pull the steak off the heat when it hits 130°F–135°F; the temperature will rise to 140°F while it rests.
6. During the last 2 minutes of cooking, lower the heat to medium and spoon a generous amount of your roasted garlic paste over the top of each steak.
7. Remove the skillet from the heat and let the steaks rest for 5 to 10 minutes. This allows the juices to redistribute.
8. Slice against the grain. Pour any leftover garlic oil from the pan over the slices.
9. Serve immediately with your favorite sides.

Roasted Garlic Sirloin Steak

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Kosher Salt: 1 box
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Top Sirloin Steak: 2 lb.

Produce

- Garlic: 2 bulbs

Pork Chops with Mushroom Sauce

Cost	Servings	Prep Time	Cook Time
$9-$14	4	10 mins	17 mins

Ingredients

- 4 boneless pork chops, 3/4-inch thick
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 (8 oz) package fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- 1/2-1 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 (10.5 oz) can of condensed cream of mushroom soup
- 3/4 cup milk

Directions

1. Place each pork chop between two pieces of plastic wrap. Using a meat mallet or the bottom of a heavy skillet, pound the pork lightly to tenderize. Season them on both sides with kosher salt and pepper.
2. Heat the oil in a large 10-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add the pork chops and cook for 5 minutes per side, or until they are well-browned on both sides. Remove the chops from the skillet and set them aside.
3. Add the mushrooms to the same skillet and sauté for 5 to 7 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in the garlic and cook for an additional minute until fragrant.
4. Whisk the condensed cream of mushroom soup and milk into the skillet with the mushrooms and garlic. Bring the sauce to a gentle boil, then reduce the heat to low. Taste the sauce and add more salt or pepper if needed.
5. Return the pork chops to the skillet. Cover and simmer for 5 to 10 minutes, or until the pork chops are cooked through and the sauce has thickened slightly. Avoid overcooking, which will make them dry.
6. Serve with your favorite side dishes, such as rice, mashed potatoes, or pasta.

Pork Chops with Mushroom Sauce

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Condensed Cream of Mushroom Soup: 1 (10.5 oz) can
- Milk: 1 small carton
- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- Kosher Salt: 1 box
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Boneless Pork Chops: 1 package (4 chops, 3/4-inch thick)

Produce

- Fresh Mushrooms: 1 (8 oz) package
- Garlic: 1 bulb

Spatchcock Chicken with Roasted Vegetables

Cost: $16-$27

Servings: 4-6

Prep Time: 20 mins

Cook Time: 45-55 mins

Ingredients

- 1 (4 lb.) whole chicken, spatchcocked (butterflied)
- 1-2 tbsp kosher salt, divided (or to taste)
- 2 tsp ground black pepper, divided
- 2 lb. potatoes, cut into 1-inch chunks
- 1 lb. carrots, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 lb. Brussels sprouts, trimmed and halved
- 2 small onions, quartered
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1/3 cup chicken broth

Directions

1. 1. Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C).
2. Pat the spatchcocked chicken dry with paper towels. Rub the chicken all over, including under the skin, with one tablespoon of the olive oil. Season the chicken with the kosher salt and black pepper.
3. In a large bowl, toss the potatoes, carrots, onions, and Brussels sprouts with the remaining 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Season the vegetables with the remaining kosher salt and black pepper.
4. Spread the vegetables in a single layer on a large sheet pan or roasting pan. Place the chicken skin-side up directly on top of the vegetables (it acts as a lid to keep them moist while they fry in the drippings).
5. Bake for 45 to 55 minutes or until the juices run clear. A meat thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the breast and thigh must read 165°F to 175°F. At the 30-minute mark, give the veggies a quick toss. If the pan looks too dark, add the 1/3 cup chicken broth now.
6. Let the chicken rest for 10 minutes before carving. Serve with the roasted vegetables.
7. Serve with the roasted vegetables.

Spatchcock Chicken with Roasted Vegetables

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Chicken Broth: 1 carton
- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Kosher Salt: 1 box
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Whole Chicken: 1 (4 lb.)

Produce

- Potatoes: 2 lb.
- Carrots: 1 lb.
- Brussels Sprouts: 1 lb.
- Onions: 2 small

Meatballs with Mushroom Sauce

Ingredients

For the Meatballs:

- 1 1/2 lb. lean ground beef
- 1/4 cup evaporated milk
- 1/4 or 1/2 cup plain bread crumbs
- 1-2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/2-1 tsp ground black pepper

For the Sauce:

- 4-6 oz fresh mushrooms (package), thinly sliced
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 (10.5 ounce) can condensed cream of mushroom soup, undiluted
- 2/3 cup evaporated milk
- 2/3 beef broth (low-sodium)
- 1/2 tsp ground black pepper (for color)

Cost: $16-$22 **Servings:** 4-6 **Prep Time:** 20 mins **Cook Time:** 40 mins

Directions

1. Preheat your oven to 350°F.
2. In a small skillet, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the sliced mushrooms and sauté them until they are tender for 5 to 7 minutes.
3. In a large bowl, combine the evaporated milk, bread crumbs, salt, and pepper. Add the ground beef and mix everything thoroughly.
4. Shape the mixture into 1.5-inch meatballs.
5. In a large, oven-safe skillet, brown the meatballs over medium-high heat. Once browned, drain any excess grease from the skillet.
6. In a separate bowl, whisk together the cream of mushroom soup, evaporated milk, and broth until smooth. Stir in the sautéed mushrooms. Pour this sauce over the meatballs in the skillet.
7. Bake uncovered for 30 to 40 minutes, or until the meatballs are cooked through and the sauce is bubbly.
8. Serve with pasta, mashed potatoes, or favorite sides.

Meatballs with Mushroom Sauce

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Evaporated Milk: 1 can
- Plain Bread Crumbs: 1 container
- Condensed Cream of Mushroom Soup: 1 (10.5 oz) can
- Beef Broth (low-sodium): 1 carton
- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Lean Ground Beef: 1 1/2 lb.

Produce

- Fresh Mushrooms: 1 (8 oz) package

Roasted Lemon Pepper Chicken

Cost: $11-$32

Servings: 4-6

Prep Time: 15 mins

Cook Time: 80-95 mins

Ingredients

- 1 (4 lb.) whole chicken
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 3/4 tsp salt-free lemon pepper seasoning
- 3/4 tsp onion powder
- 3/4 tsp garlic powder
- 1-2 tbsp seasoned salt, or to taste
- 3/4 tsp dried thyme
- 1 medium lemon, halved (or slightly larger than medium)
- 2-3 fresh rosemary sprigs

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C).
2. Gently loosen the skin around the chicken breast, legs, and thighs. In a small bowl, combine the lemon pepper seasoning, onion powder, garlic powder, seasoned salt, and dried thyme. Rub half of this spice mixture underneath the loosened skin.
3. Cut half of the lemon into quarters and place the pieces in the chicken cavity along with the rosemary sprigs.
4. If desired, skewer the cavity openings and tie the drumsticks together with kitchen string to help the chicken hold its shape.
5. Place the chicken, breast-side up, on a rack in a roasting pan. Rub the chicken all over with the olive oil. Squeeze the juice from the remaining lemon half over the chicken and rub the remaining spice mixture all over the skin.
6. Bake, uncovered, for approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes (90 minutes). A meat thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the breast and thigh must read 165°F to 175°F.
7. Once cooked, remove the chicken from the oven and cover it loosely with foil. Let it stand for 15 minutes before carving to allow the juices to redistribute. Before serving, discard the skin, lemons, and herbs from the cavity.
8. Serve with your favorite sides.

Roasted Lemon Pepper Chicken

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Salt-Free Lemon Pepper Seasoning: 1 jar
- Onion Powder: 1 jar
- Garlic Powder: 1 jar
- Seasoned Salt: 1 container
- Dried Thyme: 1 jar
- Kitchen String: 1 roll

Protein

- Whole Chicken: 1 (4 lb.)

Produce

- Lemon: 1 medium-large
- Fresh Rosemary: 1 bunch

Classic Beef Lasagna

Cost: $32-$42

Servings: 8-10

Prep Time: 20 mins

Cook Time: 75 mins

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 lb. lean ground beef
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp fresh basil, chopped
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1-2 tbsp brown sugar, to taste
- 2 1/2 tsp salt, divided, to taste
- 1 (29 oz) can diced tomatoes (low-sodium)
- 2 (6 oz) cans tomato paste
- 1/2-1 cup beef broth
- 12 dry lasagna noodles
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 pint whole ricotta cheese
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- 2 tbsp dried parsley
- 1-1 1/2 lb. (16-24 oz) mozzarella cheese, shredded

Directions

1. Preheat your oven to 375°F.
2. In a large skillet over medium heat, brown the ground beef, onion, and garlic. Drain any excess fat. Stir in the basil, oregano, brown sugar, 1 1/2 teaspoons of salt, diced tomatoes, tomato paste, and beef broth. Let the sauce simmer for 30 to 45 minutes, stirring occasionally. If it looks too thick toward the end, add an extra splash of broth.
3. Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil and cook the lasagna noodles for 5 to 8 minutes, or until they are al dente. Drain the noodles and lay them flat on towels to dry.
4. In a medium bowl, combine the beaten eggs, ricotta cheese, Parmesan cheese, dried parsley, and the remaining one teaspoon of salt.
5. Spread a thin layer of meat sauce on the bottom of a 9x13-inch baking dish.
    a. Layer 1: 4 noodles, half of the ricotta mixture, 1/3 of the mozzarella, and 1/3 of the meat sauce.
    b. Layer 2: 4 noodles, the rest of the ricotta mixture, 1/3 of the mozzarella, and 1/3 of the meat sauce.
    c. Layer 3: Remaining 4 noodles, the rest of the meat sauce, and the final 1/3 of the mozzarella.
6. Spray the inside of a sheet of aluminum foil with cooking spray and cover the baking dish. This prevents the cheese from sticking to the foil. Bake for 1 hour.
7. Remove the foil and bake for another 15 to 20 minutes, or until the top is golden brown and bubbly. Let the lasagna stand for 10 minutes before slicing and serving.
8. Serve with your favorite side or garlic bread.

Classic Beef Lasagna

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Lasagna Noodles: 1 box
- Diced Tomatoes: 1 (29 oz) can
- Tomato Paste: 2 (6 oz) cans
- Whole Ricotta Cheese: 1 pint
- Mozzarella Cheese: 16–24 oz
- Parmesan Cheese: 1 container
- Brown Sugar: 1 bag
- Dried Oregano: 1 jar
- Dried Parsley: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister

Protein

- Lean Ground Beef: 1 1/2 lb.
- Eggs: 1 carton (2 large)

Produce

- Onion: 1 small
- Garlic: 1 bulb
- Fresh Basil: 1 small bunch

Zucchini and Shrimp Pasta

Cost: $18-$27 **Servings:** 4 **Prep Time:** 15 mins **Cook Time:** 20 mins

Ingredients

- 1 lb. (16 oz) medium shrimp (raw), thawed, peeled, and deveined
- 12 to 16 oz linguine pasta (fresh or dry)
- 2 medium Zucchini, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 tsp salt, divided (or to taste)
- 1/2 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 cup Parmesan cheese, grated

Directions

1. Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Add the pasta and cook according to package directions until al dente. Before draining, scoop out about 1 cup of the starchy pasta water and set it aside. Drain the rest of the pasta and set aside.
2. While the pasta is cooking, melt the butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the shrimp to the skillet and season with 1/2 teaspoon of salt. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes, or just until they turn pink and “c” shape. Remove the shrimp and set them aside.
3. Reduce the heat to medium. Add the sliced zucchini to the skillet and season with the remaining 1/2 teaspoon of salt. Cook for 5 to 7 minutes, until the zucchini is tender. Add the minced garlic and cook for an additional minute until fragrant. *Note: If the zucchini has released a lot of liquid into the pan, spoon out or drain the excess water, so it doesn't thin out your sauce.*
4. Pour in the heavy cream and bring to a simmer, cooking for about 5 minutes until the sauce has thickened slightly.
5. Reduce the heat to low and stir in the Parmesan cheese and black pepper. If the sauce looks too thick, add a splash of your reserved pasta water to loosen it up.
6. Add the cooked shrimp and linguine back to the skillet and toss to combine.
7. Serve with your favorite side or garlic bread.

Zucchini and Shrimp Pasta

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Linguine Pasta: 1 (12–16 oz) box
- Unsalted Butter: 1 box
- Heavy Cream: 1 carton
- Parmesan Cheese: 1 container
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Medium Shrimp (raw): 1 lb.

Produce

- Zucchini: 2 medium
- Garlic: 1 bulb

Chicken Tostadas

Cost: $13-$23 **Servings:** 3 **Prep Time:** 15 mins **Cook Time:** 15 mins

Ingredients

Main Ingredients:

- 3/4 lb. chicken breasts, diced or strips
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1/2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/4 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1/2 tsp ground cumin
- 2 cups medium tomatoes, finely chopped
- 1 cup medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 1/2 cups Cheddar cheese, shredded
- 2 cups lettuce, shredded
- Sour cream, avocado slices, and black olives for serving (optional)

Tostada Base:

- 6 tostada shells
- 1 (15 oz) can black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1/2 tsp ground cumin
- 1/2 cup salsa

Directions

1. Preheat your oven to 350°F. Place the empty tostada shells on a large baking sheet and bake them for 2 to 3 minutes while the oven warms up.
2. In a small bowl, toss your diced chicken with the 1 tsp of chili powder, 1/2 tsp of cumin, salt, pepper before cooking. This ensures the flavor is locked into the meat rather than just sitting in the pan.
3. In a food processor, process the black beans and salsa until smooth. Transfer to a small saucepan and stir in 1 tsp of chili powder and 1/2 tsp of cumin. Bring to a simmer over medium heat, then remove from the heat and cover to keep warm.
4. In a large skillet add the olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the onions and sauté for 2 minutes or until slightly softened. Add the seasoned chicken and cook for 4 to 5 minutes, stirring constantly, until the chicken is golden and cooked through.
5. Spread a layer of the bean mixture over each toasted shell (leaving a 1/2-inch border). Top with the chicken and onion mixture, then the tomatoes, and then the shredded cheese.
6. Return the loaded tostadas to the oven for 2 to 3 minutes, or just until the cheese is fully melted and bubbling.
7. Top the tostadas with shredded lettuce. Garnish with extra cheese, tomatoes, avocado, black olives, sour cream, and other desired toppings.

Chicken Tostadas

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Tostada Shells: 1 package (6 shells)
- Black Beans: 1 (15 oz) can
- Salsa: 1 jar
- Cheddar Cheese: 8 oz
- Chili Powder: 1 jar
- Ground Cumin: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Black Olives: 1 can
- Sour Cream: 1 container
- Olive Oil: 1 bottle

Protein

- Chicken Breasts: 3/4 lb.

Produce

- Onion: 1 medium
- Tomatoes: 2–3 medium
- Lettuce: 1 head or bag
- Avocado: 1–2

Steak Tacos

Cost: $16-$30 **Servings:** 3-4 **Prep Time:** 15 mins + 1-2 hrs **Cook Time:** 15 mins

Ingredients

For the Tacos:

- 2 tbsp vegetable oil, divided
- 1 large onion, thinly sliced
- 2 bell peppers (yellow and red), thinly sliced
- 1/4 tsp salt, or to taste
- 6-8 (6-inch) flour tortillas
- Salsa, sour cream, cheese, and guacamole for serving (optional)

For the Marinade:

- 3/4 lb. beef flank steak, thinly sliced against the grain
- 1/2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1/4 tsp pepper
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp chili powder

Directions

1. In a bowl, whisk together the salt, pepper, 2 tablespoons oil, 2 tablespoons lemon juice, garlic, chili powder, and cumin. Place the thinly sliced steak in a resealable bag and pour the marinade over it. Seal and refrigerate for 1 to 2 hours.
2. Heat a large skillet over medium-high to high heat with 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil. Once the oil is shimmering, add the steak in a single layer. Let it sear undisturbed for 1 minute to get a nice brown crust, then stir and cook for another 1 to 2 minutes until browned. Remove the steak from the pan immediately and set aside.
3. Return the same skillet to the stove and add the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil. Toss in the onion and bell peppers. Season with 1/4 tsp salt. Sauté for 5 to 6 minutes until the edges are slightly charred but the peppers still have a bit of "snap." While the veggies cook, warm your tortillas.
4. Layer the steak and sautéed vegetables into the charred tortillas. Top with salsa, sour cream, cheese, guacamole, or other desired toppings.

Steak Tacos

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Flour Tortillas: 1 pack (6-inch)
- Vegetable Oil: 1 bottle
- Chili Powder: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister
- Toppings: Salsa, sour cream, guacamole, cheese

Protein

- Beef Flank Steak: 3/4 lb.

Produce

- Onion: 1 large
- Bell Peppers: 1 Red, 1 Yellow
- Garlic: 1 bulb
- Lemon: 1–2

Chicken Cacciatore

Ingredients

- 4 (1 1/2-2 1/2 lbs.) chicken breasts
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 3/4 tsp salt, divided (to taste)
- 3/4 tsp ground black pepper, divided
- 1 (15 oz) can tomato sauce
- 1 (15 oz) can crushed tomatoes
- 1 (8 oz) package fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1/4-1/2 cup red wine or chicken broth
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/4 tsp dried oregano
- 1/2 tsp dried thyme

Cost: $16-$34 **Servings:** 4-5 **Prep Time:** 10 mins **Cook Time:** 3-4 hrs

Directions

1. Season both sides of the chicken breasts with 1/2 teaspoon of salt and 1/2 teaspoon of ground black pepper. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the chicken and brown on both sides for 3 minutes per side. Note: The chicken won't be cooked through yet. Remove and place the chicken directly into the slow cooker.
2. In the same skillet, add the onions and mushrooms. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 to 7 minutes, until the mushrooms have softened and the onions are translucent. Add the garlic and cook for 1 more minute until fragrant.
3. Pour in the red wine and scrape up any browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Stir in the tomato sauce, crushed tomatoes, dried oregano, and dried thyme. Season the sauce with the remaining salt and pepper, or to taste. Bring the mixture to a simmer.
4. Pour the sauce mixture over the chicken in the slow cooker. Cover and cook on LOW for 3 to 4 hours. Check the chicken at the 3-hour mark. If it reaches an internal temperature of 165°F, it's done.
5. Once the chicken is done, give the sauce a stir. If the sauce is too thin, you can leave the lid off for the last 15 minutes of cooking to let it thicken.
6. Serve over pasta, mashed potatoes, or your favorite sides.

Chicken Cacciatore

Grocery List

Aisle/Pantry

- Tomato Sauce: 1 (15 oz) can
- Crushed Tomatoes 1 (15 oz) can
- Red Wine: 1 bottle
- Olive Oil: 1 bottle
- Dried Oregano: 1 jar
- Dried Thyme: 1 jar
- Salt: 1 canister
- Black Pepper: 1 canister

Protein

- Chicken Breasts: 4 (1 1/2 to 2 1/2 lbs.)

Produce

- Fresh Mushrooms: 1 (8 oz) package
- Onion: 1 medium
- Garlic: 1 bulb

GUIDE TO A WELL-STOCKED KITCHEN

Best Practices for Kitchen Organization

Efficiently managing your kitchen inventory is key to stress-free cooking. Tracking staples helps you save time, reduce waste, and simplify meal planning. This guide provides an inventory structure and organization best practices to help you get started. Use this in conjunction with the *'Meal Planning Tips & Worksheets'* section of the book.

Implement FIFO (First In, First Out)

Always place newer groceries behind older ones. Using older stock first minimizes waste and ensures maximum freshness.

Designate a "Use First" Zone

Create a specific basket or shelf for items nearing expiration. Check this zone first when planning meals to prevent spoilage.

Group and Zone Similar Items

Organize by category (e.g., all baking supplies or all canned beans). This makes taking inventory fast and prevents "double buying."

Label and Date Everything

Use a marker to date all repackaged items and freezer meals. If an item doesn't have a clear expiration date, add your own based on when it was opened.

Keep it Fresh with Airtight Containers

Transfer dry goods like rice and pasta into clear, uniform containers. This saves space, deters pests, and makes stock levels visible at a glance.

Schedule a Monthly Inventory Check

Set a recurring reminder to review your physical stock. Identifying needs before you shop prevents overbuying and uncovers forgotten ingredients.

Pantry Essentials for Budget Meals
Cheat Sheet

GRAINS & PASTA
- ☐ Rice (white, brown)
- ☐ Pasta (various shapes)
- ☐ Oats (rolled, steel-cut)
- ☐ Quinoa, Barley
- ☐ Bread, Tortillas
- ☐ Potatoes, Sweet Potatoes
- ☐ Couscous, Bulghur Wheat
- ☐ Cornmeal

CANNED & JARRED ITEMS
- ☐ Tomatoes (diced, sauce, paste, crushed)
- ☐ Beans (black, kidney, pinto, chickpeas)
- ☐ Broth/Stock (chicken, beef, vegetable)
- ☐ Tuna, Salmon, Chicken
- ☐ Vegetables (corn, green beans, peas)
- ☐ Diced Green Chiles
- ☐ Capers
- ☐ Sun-Dried Tomatoes
- ☐ Soups
- ☐ Evaporated/Condensed Milk
- ☐ Coconut Milk

BAKING & SWEETENERS
- ☐ Flour (all-purpose, whole wheat)
- ☐ Sugar (white, brown, powdered)
- ☐ Baking Soda & Powder
- ☐ Yeast (active dry or instant)
- ☐ Cornstarch
- ☐ Vanilla Extract
- ☐ Cocoa Powder, Chocolate Chips
- ☐ Honey, Maple Syrup
- ☐ Molasses

OILS, VINEGARS & SAUCES
- ☐ Cooking Oils (olive, avocado, vegetable)
- ☐ Vinegars (white, balsamic, apple cider)
- ☐ Soy Sauce, Worcestershire Sauce
- ☐ Fish Sauce, Oyster Sauce, Hoisin Sauce
- ☐ Hot Sauce, Sriracha

SPICES & HERBS (DRIED)
- ☐ Salt, Black Pepper
- ☐ Garlic Powder, Onion Powder, Cumin
- ☐ Oregano, Basil, Thyme, Rosemary
- ☐ Italian Seasoning
- ☐ Chili Powder, Paprika, Curry Powder
- ☐ Cinnamon, Nutmeg, Allspice
- ☐ Red Pepper Flakes, Bay Leaves
- ☐ Mustard Powder

SNACKS, NUTS & DRIED FRUIT
- ☐ Nuts (almonds, walnuts, pecans)
- ☐ Seeds (sunflower, chia, flax, pumpkin)
- ☐ Peanut Butter/Nut Butters
- ☐ Dried Fruit (raisins, cranberries, apricots)
- ☐ Crackers, Pretzels, Trail Mix
- ☐ Granola, Popcorn Kernels
- ☐ Cereal, Cereal Bars

OTHER STAPLES
- ☐ Coffee, Tea
- ☐ Bread Crumbs/Panko
- ☐ Cooking Spray

Fridge Essentials for Budget Meals
Cheat Sheet

DAIRY & EGGS

- [ ] Eggs
- [ ] Milk (dairy or non-dairy)
- [ ] Butter (salted/unsalted)
- [ ] Yogurt (plain or Greek)
- [ ] Cheese (shredded, block)
- [ ] Cream Cheese
- [ ] Sour Cream/Crème Fraîche
- [ ] Heavy Whipping Cream/Half-and-Half

PRODUCE

- [ ] Onions, Garlic, Ginger, Carrots
- [ ] Leafy Greens (spinach, kale, lettuce)
- [ ] Lemons, Limes
- [ ] Bell Peppers
- [ ] Apples, Oranges
- [ ] Fresh Herbs (parsley, cilantro)

CONDIMENTS & SAUCES

- [ ] Mayonnaise, Ketchup, Mustard
- [ ] Aioli, Tartar Sauce
- [ ] Salad Dressings
- [ ] Jams/Jellies
- [ ] Pesto
- [ ] Taco Sauce, Salsa

OTHER PERISHABLES

- [ ] Deli Meat, Bacon, Sausage
- [ ] Tofu/Plant-Based Proteins
- [ ] Opened Jarred Items (pickles, olives)
- [ ] Refrigerated Pasta (e.g., Tortellini)
- [ ] Coffee Creamers
- [ ] Juice (Orange, Apple, etc.)
- [ ] Applesauce
- [ ] Hummus, Dips

Freezer Essentials for Budget Meals
Cheat Sheet

PROTEINS

- ▢ Chicken (breasts, thighs, drumsticks, whole)
- ▢ Ground Meat (beef, chicken, turkey, sausage)
- ▢ Seafood (salmon, cod, tilapia, catfish, shrimp)
- ▢ Beef (steaks, stew meat, and roasts)
- ▢ Pork (chops, tenderloin, butt/shoulder)
- ▢ Meatballs, Bacon, Sausage
- ▢ Tofu/Plant-Based Proteins

BREAD & BAKED GOODS

- ▢ Sliced Bread
- ▢ Dinner Rolls, Buns
- ▢ Tortillas, Pita Bread
- ▢ Bagels
- ▢ Muffins, Cookie Dough
- ▢ Pizza Dough
- ▢ Waffles, Pancakes

VEGETABLES

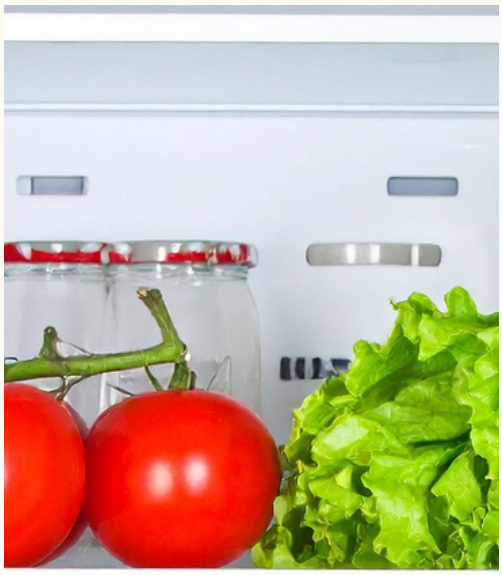
- ▢ Mixed Vegetables (broccoli, carrots, peas)
- ▢ Spinach, Kale
- ▢ Corn, Edamame, Green Beans
- ▢ Chopped Onion, Diced Peppers
- ▢ Cauliflower, Broccoli Florets
- ▢ Butternut Squash (shelled, cubed)

FRUITS & DESSERTS

- ▢ Bananas, Mango Chunks, Peach Slices
- ▢ Berries (strawberries, blueberries, raspberries)
- ▢ Pineapple Chunks, Pitted Cherries
- ▢ Ice Cream (various flavors)
- ▢ Popsicle, Sorbet
- ▢ Frozen Whipped Topping/Cool Whip
- ▢ Frozen Pie Crusts/Tarts

OTHER PERISHABLES

- ▢ Cheese
- ▢ Butter
- ▢ Stocks, Broths
- ▢ Fresh Pasta



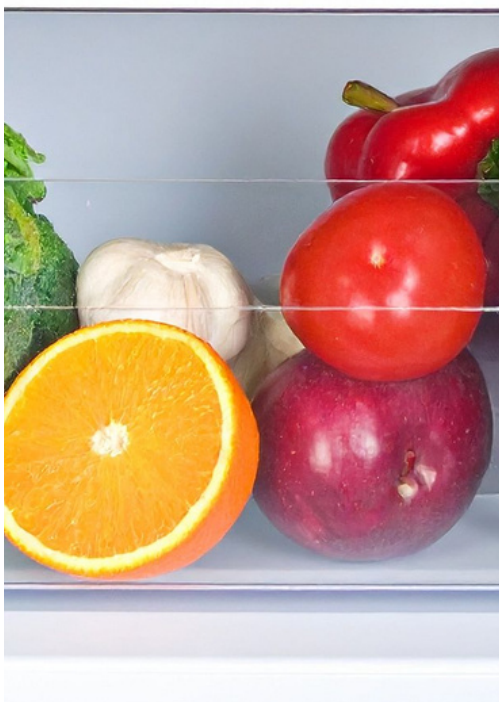
Refrigerator & Freezer Efficiency Tips

Designate Cold Zones

Store raw meats, dairy, and eggs on the coldest shelves (typically the back or bottom). Reserve the door for less perishable items like condiments and jams.

Eliminate Air Pockets

When freezing, use freezer-safe bags or containers and press out as much air as possible. Air leads to crystal formation and freezer burn.



Blanch Before Freezing

If freezing fresh vegetables (e.g., green beans, broccoli), briefly boil and then plunge them into ice water. This preserves color, texture, and nutrients.

Freeze in Meal Portions

Divide ground meats, cooked beans, or large batches of soup into individual or meal-sized portions before freezing (in freezer-safe bags). This allows you to thaw only what you need.

Never Place Hot Food Inside

Allow cooked food to cool to room temperature before placing it in the fridge or freezer. Hot food raises the internal temperature, which can compromise the safety of other items.

Check the Temperature

Ensure your refrigerator is set to 40°F (4.4°C) or below, and your freezer is set to 0°F (-18°C) or below for maximum food safety.

Use Dedicated Drawers

Utilize crisper drawers specifically for fruits and vegetables, adjusting the humidity slide (if available) to the setting recommended for the contents.

Flat Freeze for Space Saving

Pour liquids (soups, broths) into freezer-safe bags, press out the air, and freeze them flat on a tray. Once solid, store these flat packets upright like file folders to maximize freezer space and visibility.

Line Refrigerator Shelves and Drawers

Save yourself the "deep clean" stress by using shelf liners or mats. Not only do they catch drips and sticky messes, but they also provide a clean surface for your fresh ingredients, ensuring your fridge stays as organized and inviting as your meal plan.

Fill Fridge, Don't Overpack

Aim for a refrigerator that is about two-thirds full for maximum efficiency. The contents retain cold air, but leaving space for air circulation is critical for consistent cooling and food safety.

Use Natural Odor Absorbers

Keep an open box of baking soda in the back of both the refrigerator and freezer. Baking soda naturally neutralizes odors and food acids, but it should be replaced every three months to maintain peak freshness and effectiveness.

BUDGET STRATEGIES & TRACKERS

Beyond the Grocery Cart

You picked up this book to learn how to prepare meals without breaking the bank. But true budget-thriving is about more than just finding the best price at the checkout line. It's about creating a financial blueprint that gives you control, peace of mind, and the freedom to spend on what truly matters.

The truth is, your grocery budget doesn't exist in a vacuum. It's directly affected by your housing costs, subscription services, yearly savings goals, and more. By taking a brief look at your entire financial picture, you'll be able to:

- **Define your food spending limit with absolute certainty.**
- **Free up cash currently going to forgotten expenses.**
- **Align your kitchen goals (like eating healthier) with your life goals (like saving for a trip).**

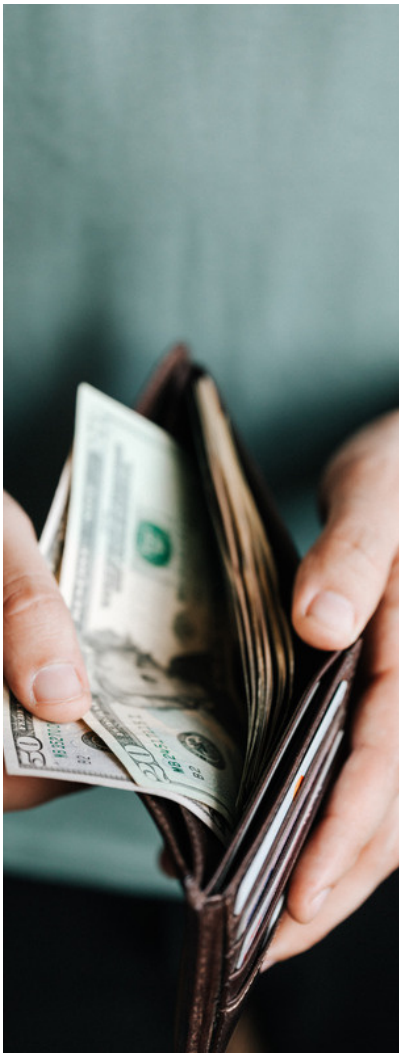
Budgeting often fails when it feels like a punishment. These worksheets change that by putting you back in the driver's seat. Rather than focusing on what you're "cutting out," you are deciding exactly where your money should work for you.

There is a special kind of confidence that comes from knowing your bills are handled, and your savings are secure. It turns every grocery trip into a victory instead of a source of stress. This is the secret to a budget you can actually live with.

Think of these worksheets not as a chore, but as tools meant to serve you. Remember: these numbers aren't set in stone. Once you have a clear handle on your income and expenses, you'll be able to flip back to the recipes in this book with a renewed sense of purpose, knowing exactly how each meal you cook contributes to your bigger picture.

Let's get started!

12 Essential Tips Before You Budget



Getting Started: The Big Picture

Before diving into the worksheets, you need a strategy for how your money should work for you. These core principles move you away from simply reacting to bills and toward a proactive plan that fits your life.

1. **The 50/30/20 rule.** Consider setting up your budgeting goals according to these guidelines:

- **50% for Needs:** Bills, Housing, Minimum Debt, Giving
- **30% for Wants:** Fun, Dining Out, Subscriptions
- **20% for Savings/Debt Repayment.**

Use this as a target when setting your limits.

2. **Give every dollar a job**. This is the core principle of successful budgeting. Before the month begins, allocate every single dollar of your expected income. If you have left over, assign it a job: 'Savings,' 'Fun Money,' or 'Extra Grocery Buffer.'

3. **Pay yourself first**. As soon as your income hits your bank, transfer your savings portion (the 20%) immediately. What's left is what you use to create your budget. This ensures you meet your goals before covering your 'Wants.'

4. **Focus on progress, not perfection**. Your first few months are a practice run. If you overspend, simply adjust your plan rather than giving up. Success is about building better habits over time, not being perfect immediately.

Tracking & Honesty: Where is the Money Going?

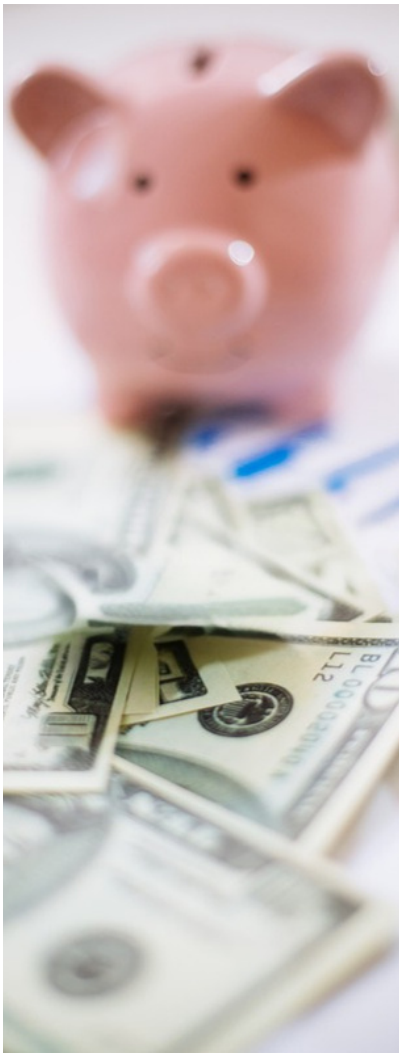
5. **Track every penny for a week**. Commit to using the *Spending Tracker* diligently for seven days. This will reveal your "money leaks," which are recurring purchases like daily coffees or vending machine snacks that usually go unnoticed.

6. **Be brutally honest**. The purpose of the *Expense Tracker* is not to judge, but to "see." Don't guess. Pull up bank statements from the last two months. You can only improve what you can clearly see and measure.

7. **Capture cash transactions**. While digital spending is easy to track, cash tends to "disappear." Use your *Spending Tracker* to log every cash purchase the moment it happens to ensure unrecorded spending doesn't throw your entire budget off track.

8. **Identify your spending triggers.** Look for patterns in your history. Do you spend more on weekends or after a stressful workday? Honesty is about understanding the 'why' behind your spending so you can make intentional changes.

Organizing and Reviewing: Staying on Track



9. **Account for irregular bills**. Use the *Bill Tracker* to note non-monthly expenses like car insurance or annual subscriptions. Divide these totals by 12 and set that amount aside each month to eliminate financial surprises.

10. **Review your yearly income.** Use the *Financial Summary* tracker to see your full financial power. Understanding your annual earnings helps you set more ambitious savings goals and stay prepared.

11. **Schedule a weekly check-in**. Budgeting isn't a one-time event; it's a habit. Set aside 15 minutes every week updating your *Budget Planner, Weekly Budget, or Monthly Budget* tracker. Consistency is what turns a one-week experiment into a lifelong lifestyle.

12. **Treat your grocery budget like a bill.** Once you determine your food spending limit, respect it as much as your rent or mortgage. When your "grocery bill" is spent for the month, rely on the budget-friendly recipes in this book to carry you through.

BUDGET PLANNER

DATE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT	CASH	CARD
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			☐	☐
			☐	☐
			☐	☐
			☐	☐
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			☐	☐

WEEKLY BUDGET

Week/Month/Year

INCOME

LIST OF INCOME	AMOUNT
1.	
2.	
3.	
TOTAL INCOME	

EXPENSES

BILL & EXPENSES	DUE	AMOUNT
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
TOTAL INCOME		

TOTAL SAVING

MONTHLY BUDGET

Month / Year

INCOME

LIST OF INCOME	AMOUNT
1.	
2.	
3.	
TOTAL INCOME	

EXPENSES

BILL & EXPENSES	DUE	AMOUNT
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
TOTAL INCOME		

TOTAL SAVING

EXPENSE TRACKER

Month:
Year:

Date	Description	Amount	Balance

SPENDING TRACKER

DATE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT	CASH	CARD
			☐	☐
			☐	☐
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BILL TRACKER

			Month											
Bill	**Amount**	**Due**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Year:

Month	Income	Savings	Expenses	Debt Paid	Giving
January					
February					
March					
April					
May					
June					
July					
August					
September					
October					
November					
December					
Total					

Thank-you!

I truly loved working on this, and I hope that comes through in the reading. I would value hearing your thoughts as you begin this new chapter, so please feel free to reach out.

If you have any questions regarding the information covered in this book, you can contact me at **info@lifestylewithjoi.com**.

Wishing you the very best on your journey!

Lifestyle with Joi

lifestylewithjoi.com