



The Reluctant Meal-Planner's
Meal Plan:
Real hope and real help for you!

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The Reluctant Meal-Planner's Meal Plan

I never thought I'd be sharing stuff like this because meal planning is hard for me. But, I've climbed that mountain of jello and I want to give you the short-cut to the top, where food is a joy and not an overwhelming stressor.

What's here:

- The best-of-my-best tips for meal planning, learned in the heat of the moment, over years of struggle.
- My one-page Spring/ Summer plan and one-page Fall/ Winter food plan. Change these up and make them your own. Just remember these two words: "simple" and "delicious".

(You'll notice that we are a gluten-free, meat-loving family. Three members in our family eat gluten-free and we lean toward Paleo/ Weston Price preferences. It helps that we live in the country where we can easily purchase inexpensive and healthy farm-raised eggs, milk, and beef.)

- My one-page grocery list. Change it and make it your own. Remember these five words: "What do I really need for the food I'm going to make this week?"

(It's important that these documents are single-sided, one-page documents so you can hang them on the fridge and access them quickly. I don't think about food unless I have to, so I rely on these cheat sheets to tell me what to do next.)

- Five of our family's favorite, regular, go-to recipes for you to try.

(These are simple, delicious, and gluten free. Otherwise, I wouldn't include them in our regular rotation. I hope you love them!)

First, the tips!

You need to know that food is not my forte.

For years, it has been an up-hill battle...on a mountain of jello.

In our family, it works *logistically* for me to take responsibility for menu planning, grocery shopping, and food preparation, but it isn't my strength or my interest.

Everything about it exhausts me: the budgeting, the coupons, the food allergies, the health ideals, the elusive photographed recipes in magazines, the *time* it takes!

For years, I'd sit with a pile of recipe books and a few grocery store fliers and take *2 stressful hours* to figure out what we were going to eat for the next few days. It was the worst part of my work at home. And I knew it needed to change.

Do you struggle with budgeting, menu planning, grocery shopping, and food prep, too?

I have good news: things got better for me and they can get better for you, too.

Here's how:

- **Ask God for "joy in food".**

I had complained about food one too many times when my friend Steph generously asked, "Have you ever asked God to give you joy in food?" No, of course I hadn't. (Why do we so often overlook our most obvious needs in prayer?)

So I began.

When I'd have to come up with a lunch for four hungry kids, I'd take a deep breath and ask God, "please give me joy in food." When I had to sit down to plan my grocery list, I'd gasp, "please give me joy in food!" Over and over again, I'd ask.

And He granted my request over time. In fact, I'm writing this post because I *do* have joy in food and I'm delighted to share what I've learned.

- **Read foodie books.**

Did you know that this is a *genre* on the shelves at your local library? People who *love food* actually write entire books about how food intersects with their lives, how they've been *formed by* food. They are more than "you should cook this beautiful recipe" to "when my dad was in the hospital, I couldn't sleep, so I stewed some left-over dates in a little pot. I drizzled on some honey and sat in the dark kitchen eating them, one by one."

Now *that* I can get into. A beautiful, memorable moment with just "dates and honey" on the grocery list? Yes, please. Spontaneous, rule-breaking, emotion-driven creativity in the *kitchen*? Yes, please.

A few years ago, I read [Bread & Wine](#). This was my first foodie book. Shauna Niequist tricked me into reading a book about food by making me think it was about God. I read books about God all of the time. That's my genre! But she wrote about God AND food and helped me see the connection.

After that, I cranked out 5 foodie books in a row. I just kept checking out the next book on the library shelf. What's great about them - and different from Food network - is that you see a person relating with food in real life. I remembering snuggling up with Molly Wizenburg's [A Homemade Life](#), and Ruth Reichl's [Tender at the Bone](#).

I began to see the beauty of food and its noble place in the home and community. Food had been stressing me out because I didn't see its beautiful purpose in life. I needed a vision - a *why* - in order to love it and work hard at it.

- **Listen to the meal-planning experts.**

Whenever I ask God for help in something, I intentionally pursue growth in that area. I'm on the look-out for insight and I trust Him to help me find useful resources. In my journey, that included resources like [Cut Your Grocery Bill in Half with America's Cheapest Family](#), [From Freezer to Table](#) by Polly Conner & Rachel Tiemeyer, and [The Life-Giving Table](#) by Sally Clarkson. I won't overwhelm you with links to *all* of the books and resources I studied over the years, but instead I'll share a list of the things that actually worked for me over time.

Five Tried-and-True Tips

1. Choose a permanent weekly shopping day/ time.

This will tether your entire plan. You'll be able to plan your weekly meals based on the freshness of the food and you'll *know* that you're going to fill that fridge consistently with healthy food for you and your family.

I didn't *want* to spend my Saturday shopping, but as it turns out, our daughter has ballet for a couple of hours on Saturday afternoon. This is when I crank out the grocery shopping. It has worked well for us to know that this is a set time on the calendar.

2. Plan a biweekly or monthly mega-menu.

Do a big grocery order every 2 weeks or once a month, and smaller orders in between.

This has been a game-changer for me. The first Saturday of every month, I buy most of what we'll need for the entire month. Anything that is shelf-stable or freezer-friendly goes in the cart. Then, the three other Saturday's, I simply pick up fresh produce and dairy.

3. Choose the ideals that you can't handle and let them go.

For me, its coupons. They overwhelm me, throw me off my game, and are not worth the savings. So, I don't do coupons unless they are sitting right there by the Tomato Sauce in Aisle 7 or are "\$5 off your next shopping trip" coupon that comes with my receipt (I just stick this in my wallet so I remember to use it the next time I pay.)

Otherwise, I just can't juggle this ball.

What is it for you?

4. Plan a seasonal menu plan with repeatable recipes.

This includes breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, desserts, and special meals. Choose simple meals that everyone likes and wouldn't mind eating every week.

You may like to make the same 7 meals week after week. For 2 years, I repeated the same basic recipes over and over again. I had to

master some basics, like making stir-fry, cooking cubed chicken, and crock-potting pulled pork. With that solid scaffolding, I'm able to add more freedom and variety to our menu plan.

Do you know how many people just repeat the same meals over and over again, week after week? So, so many. And they are doing just fine. I needed to hear this. For years, I felt beholden to every beautiful recipe I saw. "I should try that. I should try something new," I'd say. But the constant "newness" ultimately stressed me out. So, join the regulars and keep meals simple and delicious.

Print your meal plan on one page, magnet to the fridge, and *stick to the list*. Don't let Pinterest complicate your life.

5. Print a 1- or 2-page list grocery list of items that you buy regularly.

This goes on the fridge next to your Meal Plan. Through the week, highlight or circle the items you need *as soon as you think of it*. Jot any extra items in the margin.

Take this list with you when you shop and stick to the list.

With these 5 habits in place, when I sit down every Friday to plan my Saturday grocery list, I can breathe. I know what I'm making, I circle the groceries we need, and jot a few extras in the margin. I'm finished in 15 minutes.

We're enjoying nourishing food that is easy to prepare, a grateful family around the dinner table, and one happy momma.

If that's not one big slice of "joy in food," I don't know what is.

SPRING/ SUMMER MEAL PLAN

FOOD PREP: hard boil eggs, cook rice, dice chicken, roast diced potato, roast sweet potatoes, wash/ cut berries, melons, veggies; bake granola, granola bars, muffins, etc.

BREAKFAST: SMOOTHIES

Sunday: Omelets or Frittata
Monday: Yogurt, granola, fruit
Tuesday: Eggs w/ fruit
Wednesday: English muffins w/ jam, cream cheese, pb
Thursday: Eggs w/ fruit
Friday: Refrigerator Oatmeal
Saturday: Waffles, Pancakes, or French Toast

LUNCH: WATER

Sunday: Tuna Fish Salad w/ fruit
Monday: Fried Egg Sandwiches, melon
Tuesday: Pizza, veggies
Wednesday: Make Your Own Sandwiches, fruit
Thursday: PB&J, veggies
Friday: Lettuce Wraps: ham/turkey and cheese, veggies
Saturday: Grilled Cheese Sandwiches

DINNER: MILK

Sunday: Fish, rice, veggie
Monday: Grilled Chicken (Sandwiches, etc.)
Tuesday: Stir-fry (Teriyaki, Veggie, etc.)
Wednesday: Salad (Cobb, Caesar, Southwest, Mandarin, Philly, or Italian) and bread
Thursday: Instant Pot
Friday: Nachos, tacos, or quesadillas
Saturday: Pizza, veggies

DESSERTS: roasted peaches and cream, Rice Krispie treats, dirt cups, ice cream pie, frozen blueberries, berries, cookies, ice cream

FALL/ WINTER MEAL PLAN

FOOD PREP: hard boil eggs, cook rice, dice chicken, roast diced potato, roast sweet potatoes, wash/ cut berries, melons, veggies; bake granola, granola bars, muffins, etc.

SNACKS:

Avocado, Snap Peas, Yogurt tubes, apple sauce, DIY Fruit Kababs, cheese and crackers sticks, pb spoon, apple slices, pretzels, ham/ pears/ cheese tray, granola bars, cookies, muffins

BREAKFAST: SMOOTHIES

Sunday: Omelets or Frittata

Monday: Protein Muffins/ Melon

Tuesday: French Toast, berries, pecans

Wednesday: Scrambled Eggs, berries

Thursday: Steel-cut oats or Oatmeal

Friday: Sunny-Side Up Eggs or Egg Wraps (tortillas, avocado, black beans, salsa), melon

Saturday: Waffles, Pancakes, or French toast

LUNCH: WATER

Sunday: French toast or grilled cheese sandwiches

Monday: Chicken nuggets, veggies, crackers

Tuesday: Hardboiled Egg w/ melon

Wednesday: Personal pizzas w/ veggies

Thursday: Make Your Own Sandwich

Friday: Instant Pot Rice Bowls or Vegetable Soup, apples

Saturday: BLT's, Salad, or Leftovers

DINNER: MILK

Sunday: Baked Potato Bar

Monday: Chicken, veggie, fresh bread

Tuesday: Fish, Sweet Potato, Green Beans

Wednesday: Soup

Thursday: Crockpot or Instant Pot, veggie

Family Fun Friday: Nachos, tacos, or quesadillas/ special dessert

Date Night Saturday: Pizza, veggies

DESSERTS: cobblers, chocolate-coconut treats, chocolate mousse, vanilla custard, roasted almonds, cookies, ice cream, popcorn, rice cakes and Nutella, apples and PB

Canned: Peanut Butter

Almond Butter
Jelly/ Jam
Salsa
Soup/ Broth
Diced Tomatoes
Tomato Sauce
Tomato Paste
Pasta Sauce
Pizza Sauce

Baking: Almonds

Walnuts
Pecans
Macadamia Nuts
Cashews
Sunflower Seeds
Raisins
Craisins
Figs
Sugar
Flour
Spices:
Salt
Baking Powder
Baking Soda

Condiments: Mayo

Ketchup
Mustard
Lemon Juice
Lime Juice
BBQ

Dry Goods: Oatmeal

Rice Cereal
Rice Cakes
Maple Syrup
Honey
White Vinegar
Vegetable Oil
Olive Oil
Coconut Oil
Pasta
Rice

Breads: baguette

Sandwich bread
Rolls
Bagels
English Muffins

Frozen: Veggies:

French Fries
Berries
Ice Cream

Dairy: Eggs

Milk
Cream Cheese
Sour Cream
Whipping Cream
Butter
American Cheese
Block Cheese:
Yogurt (plain)
Yogurt (flavored cups)

Meat: Sausage

Hard Salami
Bacon
Fish
Chicken
Pork
Beef
Lunch Meat:

Produce: Lemons

Bananas
Apples
Melon
Berries
Seasonal Fruit for desserts
Sweet Potatoes
Potatoes
Avocados
Carrots
Broccoli
Cauliflower
Sugar Snap Peas
Spinach
Romaine
Tomatoes:
Cucumbers
Peppers
Green Beans
Garlic
Onion
Ginger
Guacamole
Veggie Dip

One more important tip...

I believe that candles in the winter, a picnic table in the summer, and good conversation year round will transform the simplest food into a meal that nourishes the body *and* soul of the people gathered around your table.

Gluten Free Blueberry Muffins

Author: Jeanine Friesen

Serves: 12

From America's Test Kitchen "How Can it Be Gluten Free Cookbook"

Ingredients

- 11 ounces (1 3/4 cups plus 2/3 cup ATK Gluten Free Flour Blend) *see below
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon xanthan gum
- 5 1/4 ounces (3/4 cup) granulated sugar
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled
- 1/2 cup plain whole-milk yogurt
- 3 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 7 1/2 ounces (1 1/2 cups) blueberries
- 2 tablespoons turbinado sugar

Instructions

1. Whisk flour blend, baking powder, salt, cinnamon, and xanthan gum together in large bowl. In separate bowl, whisk granulated sugar, melted butter, yogurt, eggs, and vanilla together until well combined. Using rubber spatula, stir egg mixture into flour mixture until thoroughly combined and no lumps remain, about 1 minute. Gently fold in blueberries until evenly distributed (batter will be thick and stiff). Cover bowl with plastic wrap and let batter rest at room temperature for 30 minutes.
2. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Spray 12-cup muffin tin with vegetable oil spray. Using ice cream scoop or large spoon, portion batter evenly into prepared muffin tin. Sprinkle turbinado sugar over top. Bake until muffins are golden and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 16-20 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking.
3. Let muffins cool in muffin tin on wire rack for 10 minutes. Remove muffins from tin and let cool for 10 minutes before serving. (Muffins are best eaten warm on day they are made, but they can be cooled, then immediately transferred to zipper-lock bag and stored at room temperature for up to 1 day. To serve, warm in 300-degree oven for 10 minutes. Muffins can also be wrapped individually in plastic wrap, transferred to zipper-lock bag, and frozen for up to 3 weeks. to serve, remove plastic and microwave muffin for 20-30 seconds, then warm in 350-degree oven for 10 minutes.)

The Girlfriends' Granola Bars

(This recipe has been passed amongst friends in our community. My friend Renee sent it to me; she got it from her friend Erin, and I don't know where it came from before that. Well-loved recipes are the best.)

2 cups oats
1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup flax meal
1 cup flour (I use a gluten free all purpose mix and it works well!)
3/4 tsp. cinnamon
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 cup raisins
1/2 cup chocolate chips
1/2 cup honey
1 egg, beaten
1/2 cup vegetable oil
2 tsp. vanilla

In a large bowl, mix together the oats, brown sugar, flax meal, flour, cinnamon, salt, raisins, and chocolate chips. Make a well in the center, and pour in the honey, egg, oil, and vanilla. Mix well using your hands. Press the mixture evenly into a greased 9x13 inch baking pan.

Mandarin Salad

(This is a go-to salad that I copied from my mother-in-law's handwritten cookbook way back in my first year of marriage. I like that it's so refreshing, and appropriate during any season of the year.)

Ingredients:

Salad:

Iceberg lettuce

Romaine lettuce

1 C. (11 ounce) Mandarin orange segments, drained

2 med. Stalks celery, chopped

2 green onions, sliced

Toss together in a large bowl.

Sugar-Toasted Almonds:

1/4 C. sliced almonds

1 T + 1 t. sugar

Cook almonds & sugar over low heat in 1-quart saucepan, stirring constantly, until sugar is melted and almonds are cooked/ coated. Break apart.

Dressing:

1/4 C. vegetable oil

2 T. sugar

1/2 t. salt

2 T. white vinegar

1 T. chpd. Parsley

dash of pepper

Shake all ingredients in a tightly covered container.

Drizzle dressing on the salad, toss. Sprinkle almonds on top.

Roasted Sweet Potato Bites

As you can see from my menu plan, I love to roast vegetables. Now that I know the 3 or 4 power-packed-vegetables that my family loves, I roast sweet potatoes, broccoli, and cauliflower every week. Recently, Sweet Potato Bites are our favorite.

Peel and cube 4 sweet potatoes.
Toss with coconut oil, garlic powder, and salt.
Roast on 425 degrees for 30-35 minutes.

Butter & Basil Salmon

This is a special-occasion recipe that I keep on hand. I copied this one from my mother's handwritten cookbook. She has always cooked the *best* salmon, pairing it with a sweet potato and spinach.

4 fresh salmon filets
3 T. butter, softened
1 T. snipped fresh basil
1 t. dried basil
1 T. snipped fresh parsley
2 t. lemon juice

Rinse and dry fish. In a small bowl, combine other ingredients. Place fish, skin-side down, on a greased, unheated broiler pan. Brush one side with sauce. Broil 5 minutes, 4 inches from the heat. Turn filets over. Brush with sauce again. Broil for 3-7 minutes more.