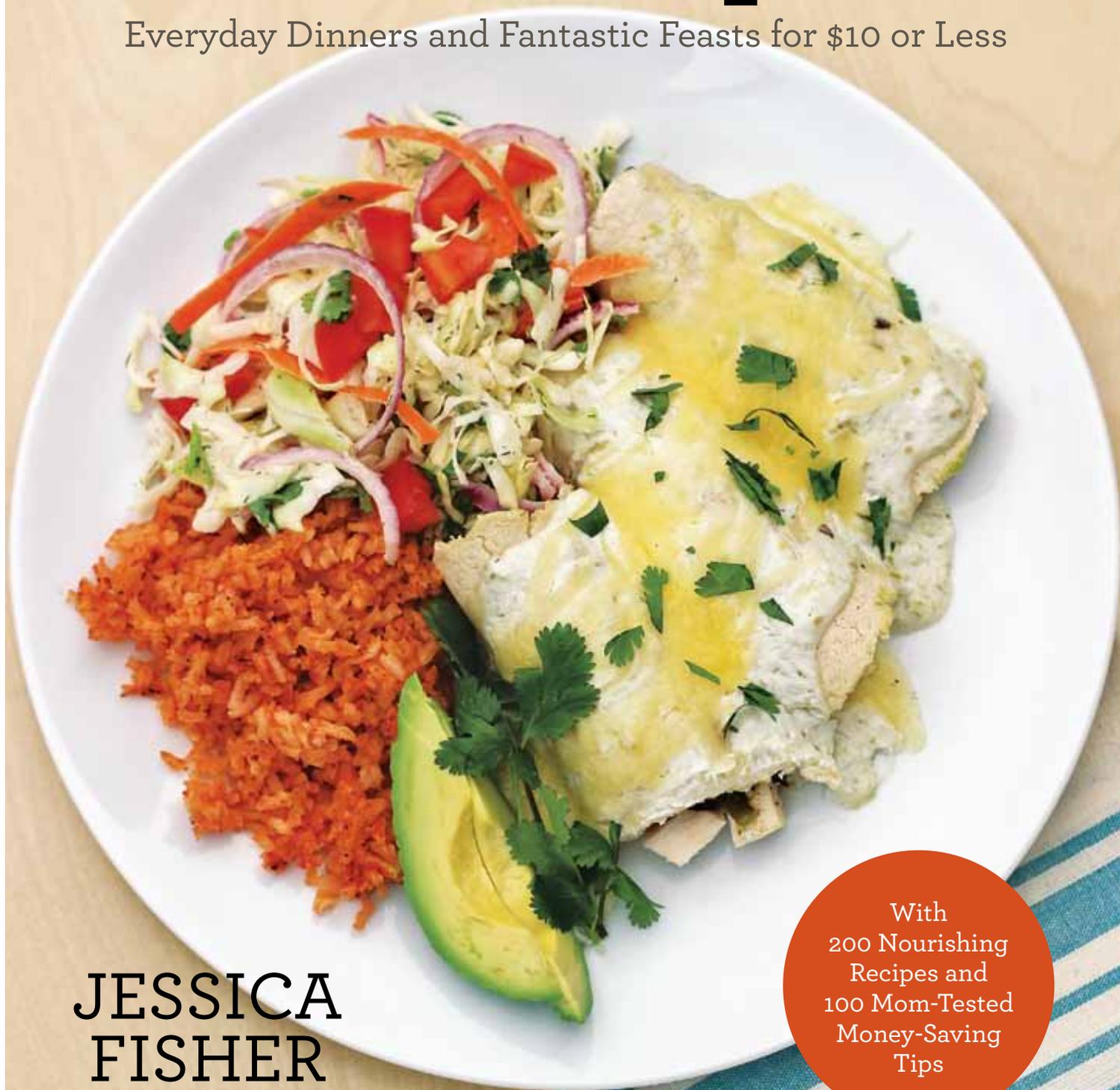


# Good Cheap Eats

Everyday Dinners and Fantastic Feasts for \$10 or Less



**JESSICA  
FISHER**

Creator of the popular blog  
Good Cheap Eats

With  
200 Nourishing  
Recipes and  
100 Mom-Tested  
Money-Saving  
Tips

# GoodCheapEats

Everyday Dinners and Fantastic Feasts for \$10 or Less

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# Introduction

I love food.

My mom says it started when I was two, at a steak house with my parents and their friends. The adults were so busy conversing that they didn't notice that the toddler had eaten the entire side order of sautéed mushrooms, a plate big enough to feed four adults.

What can I say? They were good.

And so started my foodie career. I've always liked to eat. It didn't bother me (much) that the kids at school mocked the strange toppings on my pizza or the tuna salad and sprouts that I packed in my Mork and Mindy lunch box. If it tasted good, I'd eat it.

I made a point to surround myself with food and to learn as much as I could about it. For my first job, I worked in the grocery store, bagging groceries, pushing carts, and asking customers what they were going to do with the ingredients that came down the line. One summer I got a job at an amusement park, hawking frozen bananas from a cart in the Southern California sunshine. In college I worked for the university's dining services, prepping salads, sandwiches, and other platters for the college catering company. Later I worked in a bakery and restaurant, first as a barista, then as a waitress.

While my degree may be in French literature, my heart has always belonged to food. Speaking of which, I ate my way through France during my junior year abroad. But, I bet you guessed that already.

When I married and settled down in Santa Barbara—an expensive town to live and

dine in—my husband and I were surrounded not only by great restaurants but also by great friends who showed us the art of eating well at home. That was the only way any of us could enjoy top-notch food and still make ends meet in such an affluent community.

For our part, we lived in a 200-square-foot studio apartment in order to stay in town and under budget. I would cook up a storm on Sunday afternoons so that we could bring friends home with us from church that evening for supper. We'd squeeze as many people as we could into that tiny studio, with some folks lounging on the bed, others gathered around the table. We'd share a meal, a bottle of wine, and plenty of good conversation.

The joys of eating well at home have provided the sustenance we rely on, first to make our way as a newlywed couple and later to nourish our brood of six growing and seemingly always hungry children. When the first FishBaby arrived and I became a stay-at-home mom, we learned through trial and error how to feed a family on a budget. As subsequent FishKids were added to our clan, we learned more about feeding a crowd with healthy yet frugal food. Home-cooked meals have also served to comfort us through unemployment, debt, loss of family members, and cross-country moves. Good food has been there through feast and famine, comfort and celebration.

If we're together and eating well, our hearts are happy.

For us, good cheap eats is an integral part of all that. We've always lived on a tight budget, so it's been important for us to stretch each dollar as far as it could go. Even during the process of paying off excessive consumer debt in a down economy, we made it a priority to eat the tastiest and healthiest food we could afford.

## Why Good Cheap Eats?

Good food is a part of every culture. It brings comfort and nourishment as well as a social connection. Gathering around the supper table is not only a time to refuel physically after a long day, but it's also a time to reconnect with friends and family.

As a college student and later a new bride, I pored over gourmet magazines and pined over fancy restaurant menus, wishing that our budget could accommodate my foodie cravings. What I learned through practice—and failure—was that I could cook just as well as—if not better than—some of the restaurants we loved, and furthermore, that I could do it for pennies on the dollar.

In life and on my blog, Good Cheap Eats, my motto has been, “Eat well, enjoy life, act your wage.” That last part I learned the hard way.

## Our Wrestle with Debt

In 1998, we had just taken out our first mortgage, a stepping-stone to years of debt. Up until that point, I'd never even carried a balance on my credit card. We'd paid off my student loans within two years of graduation. We built a sizeable emergency fund before the birth of our first child, which marked my

“retirement” from public school teaching.

And then we bought a house, moved far from family and friends, and started to live beyond our means. It didn't happen all at once. We'd always been frugal people, cooking meals at home and searching for bargains when we were out. But our spending started to exceed our income, and before long we had nickel-and-dimed ourselves into debt.

Nine years later, we found ourselves in the hole with two homes mortgaged, sky-high credit card bills, and nonexistent savings. That was 2007. We were lucky enough to get a wake-up call before the rest of the country. It was then that we got serious about learning to manage our money better. We cut up our credit cards and created a zero-based budget where every expense was planned and agreed upon. We read up on resources for getting out of debt and followed Dave Ramsey's unique plan for getting our financial house in order. And we ate beans and rice. A lot of beans and rice. In the end, we paid off \$18,000 over the course of 18 months—and we lived to tell about it.

One of the keys to our survival was learning how to eat well on a budget. We learned over time how to shop and how to eat in ways that pleased our foodie taste buds and the more “selective” preferences of the FishKids without sending us to the poorhouse.

That's what this book is about: great food, happy hearts, and balanced bank accounts.

But this doesn't mean that you have to subsist on cheap ramen noodles and macaroni skillet dishes—we sure don't. Some of the best from-scratch meals in the world are

crafted from wholesome ingredients using simple preparations. In addition, you'll find shopping tricks, meal planning strategies, and tips to build a pantry that will serve you and your wallet effectively. They will enable you to stretch your dollar, eat well, and really enjoy your life.

## About This Book

This book is a road map toward shopping wisely, choosing ingredients carefully, and planning meals that your family will enjoy; and of course, it's full of recipes to help you do it with taste and style, all while staying under budget.

Don't be afraid to serve simple food; it's kept civilization going for centuries. When you mix up the flavor profile and introduce various gourmet touches, simple food becomes a feast for kings. It's comforting, stick-to-your-ribs, give-you-strength-to-face-the-day kind of food. And it's good cheap eats.

Good taste doesn't have to be expensive. It doesn't need to be complicated. It just needs to be real and wholesome and honest. We often get confused into thinking that meals that come in a package or from a restaurant are better because they demand a high-ticket price. But that's just not true. The recipes in this book are better for your health—and your pocketbook—because you make them from scratch.

There's no doubt that cooking at home from whole ingredients is more healthful and generally more economical than buying commercial convenience items or eating restaurant fare. While there's a place for all of these approaches, my heart is with home-

made. Not only do you feed your body better, but you also create connections with family and friends when you can gather in the kitchen, preparing a meal together and later enjoying it *à table*. That is one of the main reasons I'm dedicated to helping the home cook gain independence from the box, the drive-thru line, and high food costs.

Throughout the book, you will find my 101 top tips for shopping for and preparing budget-friendly meals. These strategies guide the \$10 price point of the meals in this book. While all of the recipes are made with generally inexpensive ingredients, you'll reduce your costs even further by following the good cheap eats standards.

## About Ingredients

In my perfect world, all animals would be raised without added hormones or the need for antibiotics and then slaughtered humanely; all produce and grain would be grown the old-fashioned way (that is, without toxic chemicals or genetically modified organisms); and all convenience items would be crafted carefully from real ingredients. Unfortunately, that world is still a dream.

With grandparents and great-grandparents who farmed the lands of Minnesota, I have a heart for the farmer and for real food. While I've done my time being swayed by brightly colored packaging and catchy jingles, I've come to the conclusion that whole foods are better for us. I know that how I spend my dollar supports the farmer and serves as an investment in my family's health. I'm also a firm believer in getting the biggest bang for your buck. These are some-

times conflicting values: food quality versus cost. I know from experience the temptation of going for the rock-bottom price—which sometimes, but not always, signifies rock-bottom quality.

In my family, we're intent on buying the highest quality that our budget will allow and making baby steps toward that perfect world. Living in Southern California as we do, this means that a \$40 organic produce delivery each week is very doable. We eat most of our vegetables fresh as opposed to canned or frozen because that is the best deal for where we live.

Chicken and meats, on the other hand, are a bit pricier. While I would love to buy grass-fed, free-range, and organic all the time, I just can't swing the high prices those items command in this neck of the woods. We do the best we can, watching for sales and specials and strategizing ways to have the best of both worlds.

That's my recommendation for you, too, wherever you find yourself shopping: Buy the best quality that your wallet will allow, enjoy real food, and work toward making positive changes in your family's diet.

## Tools of the Trade

Since we've already established that home-cooked, whole foods are a pretty good thing to shoot for, it's important to set ourselves up for success. Making a task easier means it will happen more frequently and it will be more fun to do. (How's that for some sweet justification to buy a new bread machine?)

Kidding!

Kitchen fantasies aside, you don't need to

outfit your kitchen with all new appliances and drawers full of gadgets. But there are some tools of the trade that will make cooking and eating at home easier. Here are some of the basics that I've found to be especially helpful in the kitchen:

**Good knives:** There are few things more frustrating to a cook than to have dull, junky knives. It will make you want to throw up your hands and fill the freezer with TV dinners. Don't do it—but don't go out and buy a deluxe set of knives, either. A good chef's knife and a bread knife will do just fine. We invested in a good set when we married, and they've lasted us more than 20 years. A few years ago we bought a sharpener so that we can keep a sharp blade going. Cooking is so much more pleasant an experience when the knives are well sharpened.

**Cutting boards:** Have enough cutting boards so that you can dedicate one to meats and one to fruits and vegetables. Keep them clean and sanitized and ready to help you get chopping.

**Pots and pans:** Again, you don't need a fancy 12-piece set; a stockpot, a large skillet, and a saucepan are a great start. As with knives, choose quality over quantity, but there's no need to buy top of the line.

**Slow cooker:** A slow cooker can be your best friend. Who else will spend all day cooking your supper and have it ready when you get home? These go on sale for as low as \$20, making them an inexpensive addition to your kitchen that will repay you generously.

**Bread machine:** Store-bought or bakery bread can be expensive. Homemade not only tastes better, but it's also much more eco-

nomical. Mixing and kneading bread dough by hand works just fine, but a bread machine can take a lot of the work and mess out of the experience. I've had a bread machine for more than 13 years and really rely on it to help me with my baking.

**Handheld mixer:** Folks rave about stand mixers, but honestly, I think they're over-rated. I can do everything I want to do with an inexpensive handheld electric mixer. My stand mixer, a Mother's Day gift years ago, usually serves as a fruit bowl.

**Food processor:** Food processors are a whiz at completing any number of tasks in a matter of seconds. This is my workhorse for making everything from pie crust to salsa, as well as shredding cheese, chopping vegetables, and pureeing sauces.

**Immersion blender:** While the food processor can do everything the immersion blender can do, I turn to this gadget when I want to blend sauces and soups without dirtying another pan—or spilling piping-hot liquid all over myself. I resisted buying one for years, but I have since found it to be one of my very favorite kitchen appliances. Immersion blenders are inexpensive, too, starting at about \$20, which is a lot cheaper than their countertop cousins.

**Food scale:** A food scale is a godsend for portioning out bulk purchases for freezing, something I do often in order to cut unit costs. When I measure things out, I find that we can get by with a lot less, and that saves us money.

**Meat thermometer:** One of the most perplexing issues for novice cooks is how to know when a roast or chicken is done. With

an instant-read meat thermometer, you'll know exactly when a meat has been cooked long enough to be safe to eat—but not so long that it's dried out. (See page 117 for helpful tips on testing doneness.)

## About the Recipes: Costs, Yields, and Accompaniments

Each meal in this book is designed to feed four adults (or four adult-size appetites, if you've got growing teens in your family!) for \$10 or less when frugal shopping techniques are applied. While savvy shopping is a prerequisite to meeting the \$10 price point, these recipes contain generally inexpensive ingredients anyway, so if you need to break the good cheap eats rules, yours can still be an economical meal.

There are some recipes, however, that yield a larger number of servings, as in the case of a roast, a pot of soup, or a cake. It's simply easier and more economical to make that bigger batch. Where these recipes are concerned, the cost applied to your dinner's total will include only the portion that will be consumed in that sitting. For instance, a full pan of lasagna can feed up to eight people, and a batch of four dozen cookies will keep the whole family happy for days. Therefore, in such instances, the cost of about half a pan of lasagna and eight to twelve cookies is what counts toward the hypothetical dinner total. For tips on what to do with leftovers, read about Werewolf Meals on page 263. You can easily and tastefully turn leftovers into something else the next night.

The recipes included in each menu are designed to complement one another, but

please feel free to mix and match them in other ways. I've tried to create recipes with an inherent versatility that will allow you great freedom as well as hundreds of possible combinations. Many recipes can stand alone instead of being part of the menu, and the recipe notes offer lots of alternative serving suggestions.

If you're a visual person, you'll be pleased to know that there is a database of photographs of recipes in this book located at [GoodCheapEats.com/gallery](http://GoodCheapEats.com/gallery), in addition to the photos that appear in these pages.

Many families nowadays follow special diets due to food allergies and sensitivities. My youngest daughter is allergic to walnuts and peanuts, so we are very careful to read labels and adapt recipes so that she can enjoy them safely. Even though a food item might not contain the allergen in question, the risk of cross-contamination at the factory is often a concern. Cooking most foods at home allows us to save money as well as ensure a healthy and safe diet for her. The following designations are provided for each recipe to help you know at a glance how it fits into the bigger picture of your life and dietary preferences.

**Meatless:** Making meals without meat is a great way to eat more healthfully—and cut costs.

**Dairy-free:** Many recipes can easily be adapted for dairy-free eating, but those that are naturally dairy-free are indicated as such.

**Gluten-free:** The same goes for gluten-free eating. However, manufacturers hide gluten in crazy places, so be sure to read all ingredient labels to ensure, for example,

that there is no gluten lurking in your bacon, soy sauce, or chili powder. Naturally gluten-free recipes are designated as such, though countless others can easily be adapted to work without gluten.

**Slow cooker:** The slow cooker has seen a fresh and creative new life in modern times. It's the ideal vessel for braising inexpensive cuts of meat and for prepping dinner while you're gone, making it even easier to bypass expensive alternatives on your way home from work or school.

**Make-ahead:** One of the enemies of home cooking is hunger, believe it or not. It drives you to the fast-food restaurant, having convinced you that it'll be quicker than cooking at home. With make-ahead meals, you can do the prep work the night before or first thing in the morning and tell hunger to take a hike, knowing that supper is just a few minutes from being served after you walk in the door that evening.

**Freezer-friendly:** I am a huge fan of freezer meals—after all, I wrote the book on it! If you liked my first book, *Not Your Mother's Make-Ahead and Freeze Cookbook*, then you'll appreciate the freezer-friendly options peppered throughout this book. If you're not yet familiar with that book or with freezer cooking in general, then these recipes will be a good way to get your feet wet. Having a meal in the freezer can be a godsend on busy weeknights. You can also wrap leftovers for freezing to enjoy a week or a month later if you like. Cooking in bulk and freezing the meals to use later is a fantastic way to save money.

## Shopping and Cooking the Good Cheap Eats Way

Since prices vary by location and season, I haven't assigned a specific dollar amount to each meal, but I'm confident that you will keep your food costs low if you follow the 101 tips for good cheap eats.

For an example of how the 101 tips can transform your grocery receipts, let's see how the numbers crunched on one of my favorite meals: a chicken Caesar salad with mint iced tea and a cookie for dessert. For the recipes, head to page 294.

### Eating at a Café

Chicken Caesar Salad = \$10.95

Mint Iced Tea = \$2.00

Gourmet Chocolate Chip Cookie = \$1.50

Total: \$14.45 per person, or \$59.80 for four people, plus tip

### Preparing the Meal with Store-Bought Convenience Items

1 bag washed, torn romaine lettuce = \$2.49

1/3 bottle prepared dressing = \$1.50

1/2 package prepared croutons = \$1.75

1/2 ounce Parmigiano-Reggiano = \$0.62

12 ounces grilled chicken breast = \$7.98

4 bottles mint iced tea = \$8.00

1 package gourmet cookies = \$4.00

Total: \$26.34 for four people

### Preparing the Meal the Good Cheap Eats Way

1 head romaine lettuce = \$0.99

Homemade dressing = \$1.13

Homemade croutons = \$0.33

1/2 ounce Romano cheese = \$0.22

1 pound raw chicken breast = \$1.99

Home-brewed iced tea with fresh mint and honey = \$0.70

12 home-baked cookies = \$1.00

Total: \$6.36 for four people

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## MENU

Hot Dog and Sausage Buffet

Classic Sautéed Peppers and Onions

Spicy No-Bean Chili

Hot dogs and sausages are my go-to casual meal for feeding a crowd. They are easy on the budget, but you can rock the crowd-pleasing standards if you also serve a spectacular array of toppings alongside.

## Hot Dog and Sausage Buffet

Serves 4

MAKE-AHEAD

Use whatever kind of sausages you like here, from the precooked chicken variety to uncured beef or pork. Just adjust the cooking time according to the package directions.

8 hot dogs or sausage links, or a combination  
8 hot dog buns

### TOPPING SUGGESTIONS

Various mustards and bottled condiments

Chopped onions

Classic Sautéed Peppers and Onions (page 166)

Homemade salsa, like Chunky Tomato Salsa (page 35)  
or Roasted Chipotle Salsa (page 221)

Coleslaw with a Kick (page 187)

Chunky Guacamole (page 184)

Spicy No-Bean Chili (page 167)

Pulled Pork (page 186)

Shredded cheese of your choice

1. Cook the hot dogs or sausages on the grill, on the stovetop, or in the slow cooker.
2. Wrap the hot dog buns in aluminum foil and warm on the grill or in a low oven until hot, 5 to 10 minutes.
3. Serve the hot dogs buffet style, with a variety of toppings as desired.

---

*MAKE IT AHEAD:* Prepare the different toppings up to 1 day in advance and store in the refrigerator until ready to serve. Right before serving, reheat any items that should be served hot.



## TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL HOT DOG AND SAUSAGE BUFFET BAR

**P**retend you're running the best hot dog truck in town. You've got great meats (no mystery links here) and fresh rolls. Plan a spread to please anybody and everybody. It's really not that hard.

- 1. Offer a variety of sausages.** Consider different meats and spice levels, and perhaps a vegan or vegetarian option. Cook them well and keep them hot.
- 2. Have plenty of fresh rolls.** You can bake your own or steam store-bought buns to soften them prior to serving. If you've got the grill going, try grilling the rolls.
- 3. Let your imagination run wild with the toppings.** Think outside the box and offer lots of choices—you don't need to be limited to bottled condiments!

# Classic Sautéed Peppers and Onions

Serves 4

MEATLESS DAIRY-FREE GLUTEN-FREE MAKE-AHEAD

This vegetable mixture goes well on hot dogs, sausages, burgers, and sandwiches. It's particularly good on a cheesesteak sandwich or tucked into a vegetarian wrap.

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and thinly sliced
- 1 green bell pepper, seeded and thinly sliced
- 1 medium onion, thinly sliced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano

In a large skillet over medium heat, heat the oil until shimmering. Add the bell peppers and onion and sauté quickly until tender but still slightly crisp, 7 to 8 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Stir in the red wine vinegar and the oregano. Serve hot or warm.

---

*MAKE IT AHEAD:* Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. Reheat gently on the stovetop or in the microwave.

## #53

### FIND ANOTHER WAY

Eliminate expensive ingredients whenever possible. Back in the old days, I could buy a can of chopped green chiles for a quarter. Now the price is easily five times that. Instead of buying the can, I chop fresh chiles, which I can buy for a few pennies apiece.

## Spicy No-Bean Chili

Serves 4

DAIRY-FREE GLUTEN-FREE MAKE-AHEAD FREEZER-FRIENDLY

This meaty chili comes together quickly and easily on the stovetop. It's great for chili dogs but is equally delicious atop baked potatoes, pasta, and nachos, or folded into burritos.

**12 ounces ground beef, turkey, pork, or chicken**  
**2 tablespoons finely chopped onion**  
**2 tablespoons finely chopped seeded jalapeño**  
**1 teaspoon minced garlic**  
**1 (8-ounce) can tomato sauce**  
**1 tablespoon Mexican Spice Blend (page 81)**

In a large skillet over medium-high heat, cook the meat, onion, jalapeño, and garlic until the meat is browned and the onion is translucent, 10 to 15 minutes. Spoon off any fat. Stir in the tomato sauce and spice blend. Simmer for 10 minutes.

---

*MAKE IT AHEAD:* Store the chili in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 4 days or in the freezer for up to 2 months.

---

## FRESH HERBS VERSUS DRIED

I grew up in a household where much of the produce was fresh from the garden, but the herbs were of the dried variety, purchased in a jar and stored in the cupboard. I didn't know any different. That's how my grandmothers had cooked; that's how my parents cooked; that's how I learned to cook. I didn't meet a fresh clove of garlic until college. Prior to that, I thought that garlic was for decoration in Italian restaurants and that a garlic press was for making cool "hair" for Play-Doh people.

In college, while cooking in a catering kitchen, I discovered fresh herbs. I got to know their different flavors and textures. I learned that they "worked" differently than their dried counterparts. I'm still exploring the nuanced differences between fresh and dried herbs and experimenting with new acquaintances.

I've read books by authors who completely eschew the use of dried herbs, claiming that they taste like dust. This may be the case with some of the tins you've had high up in the cupboard for 5 or 10 years, but dried herbs that are used in a reasonable amount of time can be a great, affordable fill-in for fresh.

Fresh herbs have a lot going for them. They are easy to grow and offer a light, fresh flavor to foods. Dried herbs, for their part, have a longer shelf life and don't melt into a weird pile of goo at the bottom of your crisper. I say there's a place for each in your kitchen. Here are some things to keep in mind as you include herbs (fresh or dried) in your kitchen.

Grow your own herbs if you can, either on a kitchen windowsill or steps from your back door so that you have easy access. Growing herbs from seed or buying a potted plant is also a more economical way to buy your herbs than buying a small packet in the produce department.

Store cut fresh herbs in the manner that is most suited to that variety. For instance, store parsley and cilantro in the fridge in cups of water with a plastic bag inverted over the greens. Store mint wrapped in damp paper towels in a bag in the fridge. Basil and dill can be stored using either method.

Dried herbs should be stored in a cool, dry place away from the stove. I buy mine in bulk or on sale to keep costs down, storing larger containers in the freezer. You can also split a bulk-size container with a friend or two to benefit from the bulk pricing without having to store a lot. Dried herbs that have lost their color and scent are too old to be flavorful.

Dried herbs also allow you to mix up custom seasoning blends easily. See page 80 for some ideas to get you started creating your own mixtures.



## MENU

Skillet Poached Eggs with Spinach

Oaty Maple Breakfast Cake

Monkey Salad

This meal contains everything you need for a well-rounded, meatless supper: protein, greens, and fruit. Plus, there's cake. What more could anyone want?

# Skillet Poached Eggs with Spinach

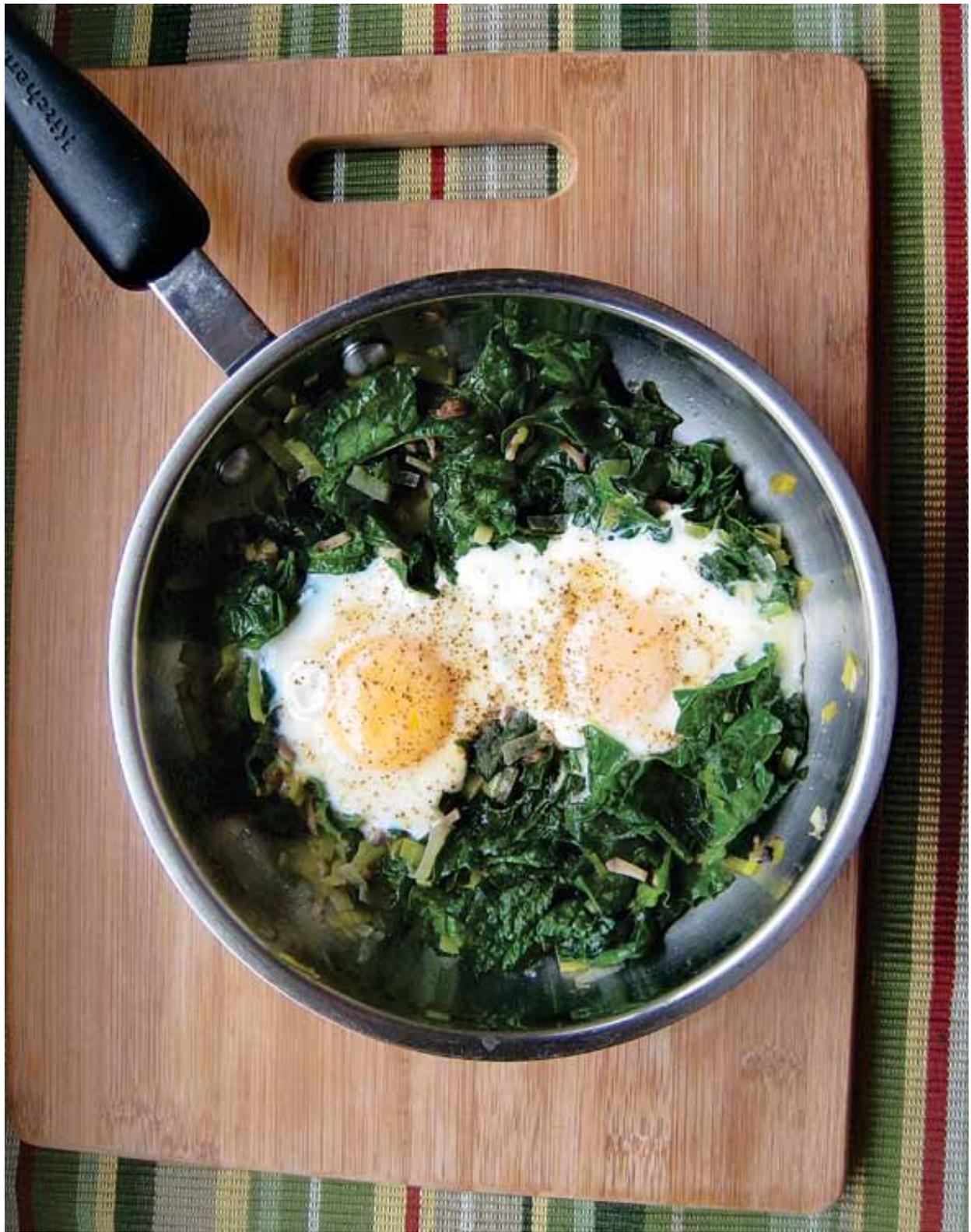
Serves 4

MEATLESS DAIRY-FREE GLUTEN-FREE

I serve these eggs several times a week, adjusting the type of greens or other additions depending on what's in the fridge. Sometimes I add mushrooms and bacon, sometimes onions and kale. Feel free to mix it up with whatever you have on hand.

2 tablespoons olive oil  
2 leeks, halved lengthwise and thinly sliced crosswise into half-moons  
5 ounces baby spinach  
8 large eggs  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. In a large skillet with a lid, heat the oil over medium heat until shimmering. Add the leeks and sauté until tender, 3 to 5 minutes. Add the spinach. Stir gently and cook until slightly wilted.
2. Spread out the spinach mixture to create 8 small wells. Crack an egg into each well. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
3. Cover and cook until the desired doneness is reached for the eggs, 5 to 8 minutes.



## #80

### HAVE A PLAN B

Make a list of quick-fix meals and keep it handy in the kitchen. Better yet, keep those staple ingredients on hand. You're less likely to run for takeout if you have a backup plan for those nights when your regular meal plan doesn't pan out.

## Oaty Maple Breakfast Cake

Makes 1 (9-inch) cake

MEATLESS MAKE-AHEAD

This cake is the result of my efforts to mimic my husband's favorite coffeehouse maple-oat scones. Baking it all into a cake makes for easy prep work while still featuring all of the fabulous, mapley-oaty goodness.

**2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour**  
**½ cup rolled oats**  
**6 tablespoons (¾ stick) cold butter, cut into pieces**  
**1½ teaspoons baking powder**  
**½ teaspoon baking soda**  
**¼ teaspoon fine sea salt**  
**1 cup half-and-half**  
**⅓ cup pure maple syrup**  
**1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract**  
**1 cup confectioners' sugar, sifted**  
**1 tablespoon milk**  
**2 teaspoons maple flavoring**

- 1.** Preheat the oven to 400°F. Grease a 9-inch round cake pan with nonstick cooking spray.
- 2.** In the bowl of a food processor fitted with a metal blade, combine the flour, oats, butter, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Pulse until coarse crumbs are formed. Transfer this mixture to a large bowl.
- 3.** Add the half-and-half, maple syrup, and vanilla. Stir quickly until a thick batter is formed.
- 4.** Spoon this mixture into the prepared pan and bake until a tester inserted in the middle comes out clean, about 20 minutes. Cool slightly in the pan on a rack.
- 5.** Meanwhile, prepare the glaze by combining the confectioners' sugar, milk, and maple flavoring in a small bowl. Drizzle this glaze over the warm cake and allow to cool completely before serving.

---

*MAKE IT AHEAD:* Store the cake in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 3 days.

## #81

### LOCATION IS EVERYTHING

Where you shop matters. Some grocery chains offer different pricing based on the zip code. I've seen big box stores within the same chain only five miles from each other offer significantly different pricing. With a cart full of foodstuffs, this can make a big difference at the checkout stand. If you live near a state line, it may even be worth your while to cross the border for grocery shopping.

## Monkey Salad

Serves 4

MEATLESS DAIRY-FREE GLUTEN-FREE

This salad is addicting. I love it for its simplicity and its ease of preparation, not to mention the great combination of flavors.

**4 bananas, peeled and sliced**  
**1 cup unsalted roasted cashews**  
**½ cup unsweetened coconut chips**

Divide the banana slices among four serving bowls. Top each with ¼ cup cashews. Sprinkle 2 tablespoons coconut chips into each bowl. Do not stir. Enjoy immediately.

## MENU

### Tortellini-Chickpea Pasta Salad

### Baby Cakes

Pack a filling one-dish-meal pasta salad, loaded with veggies and chickpeas, for a meatless Monday lunch. Finish it off with some little home-baked “cakes,” which are actually cookies—a great portable dessert no matter what you are serving beforehand!

## Tortellini-Chickpea Pasta Salad

Serves 4

MEATLESS MAKE-AHEAD

Pasta salad has always been one of my go-to meals. If I add hearty ingredients like beans or cheese, the men in my midst are appeased. If I add veggies, I’m a happy camper. So, naturally, this salad has both.

**1 (12-ounce) package cheese tortellini (fresh, dried, or frozen)**  
**1/3 cup red wine vinegar**  
**Juice of 1/2 lemon**  
**1/2 teaspoon minced garlic**  
**1/2 teaspoon dried oregano**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil**  
**2 cups cooked or canned chickpeas (rinsed and drained if canned)**  
**2 cups chopped fresh spinach**  
**1 (10-ounce) package grape tomatoes**  
**1/4 cup chopped peeled carrots**

**1.** Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat and cook the tortellini according to the package directions. Drain and let cool slightly.

**2.** In a small jar or bowl, combine the vinegar, lemon juice, garlic, oregano, and salt and pepper to taste. Place the lid on the jar and shake well or whisk until smooth. Add the olive oil and shake or whisk again to emulsify.

**3.** In a large bowl, combine the tortellini, chickpeas, spinach, tomatoes, and carrots. Pour the dressing over the salad and toss gently to combine. Adjust the seasonings as desired. Pack in individual serving containers and serve chilled or at room temperature.

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*MAKE IT AHEAD:* Store the finished salad in the refrigerator for up to 4 days.

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# GET YOUR KITCHEN READY FOR VACATION

**Y**ou're getting ready to leave town; you've got your bags packed; you're looking forward to some rest and relaxation. Before you go, consider spending a few hours in the kitchen.

Say what?

Yes, really. An hour or two in your kitchen before you leave town can save you lots of money and heartache during and after your trip. If you don't, you could be wasting a ton of food and, in turn, a ton of money. It's in your best interests to get the kitchen ready for vacation, too. Here's what you can do to not waste good food while you're away.

## 1. EAT IT UP.

Serve leftovers in the last few days before a trip so that you can use up what you have and not let it go to waste.

## 2. JUICE IT.

Homemade juices and smoothies are a great way to use up produce while it's still fresh.

If the vegetable drawers are full, make juice. If you don't have a juicer, you can make smoothies with many of the fruits and vegetables that you might have on hand. (If you're interested in learning more about juicing, check out my book *Best 100 Juices for Kids*. It includes juice recipes that folks of every age will enjoy.)

## 3. FREEZE IT.

If you have the time, prep freezer meals with the food you have left in the fridge. If not, then take a few minutes to make those items freezer-friendly. Wrap, label, and freeze any leftovers that are still worth saving.

## 4. TAKE IT WITH YOU.

When we know we will have access to a kitchen on vacation, we pack meals for the road and for our stay. Packing food from home can save you money during your trip and help you avoid wasting money when food goes bad before you can eat it up. Plus, if you've got food allergies to account for, bringing food from home means you can have an easier time enjoying meals that suit everyone.

## 5. STORE IT PROPERLY.

If you're going to be gone for only a short time, make sure that you store in the refrigerator the fruits and vegetables that might ripen too quickly on the counter.

## 6. SHARE IT.

Friends and neighbors may be more than happy to take that gallon of milk or that basket of peaches off your hands. Bless them.

## 7. DITCH IT.

Throw out what is bad or very close to it. It's not going to make you love your kitchen more to come home to things that might be stinky, slimy, or rotten.

*Bon voyage!*



## #89

### DESSERT ON A DIME

Buy chocolate candy on clearance after holidays like Valentine's Day, Easter, Halloween, and Christmas. Chop and use it as a substitute for chocolate chips in baking. You won't believe how low the prices will go, and chocolate keeps well for months.

## Baby Cakes

Makes 3 dozen cookies

MAKE-AHEAD FREEZER-FRIENDLY

When I was little, my dad always called my sisters and me “Baby Cakes” as a term of endearment. He also always seemed to have candy in his coat pockets or in his car. Always. These cake-like cookies filled with candy are named in his honor.

Use your favorite candy or whatever is on clearance in your store's holiday section.

- 1 cup sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup (1½ sticks) butter
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2⅓ cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon fine sea salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup small candy pieces, such as candy-coated chocolates, chopped candy bars, or crushed toffee

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper or silicone baking mats.
2. In a large bowl, cream together the sugar and butter. Add the eggs and vanilla and beat until well combined.
3. Stir in the flour, baking powder, and salt. Fold in the candy.
4. Scoop the dough into rounded tablespoons and place 2 inches apart on the prepared baking sheets.
5. Bake until firm and beginning to brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Cool on a rack before wrapping in plastic wrap or storing in individual zip-top plastic bags.

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*MAKE IT AHEAD:* Layer the cookies in an airtight container and store at room temperature for up to 1 week or in the freezer for up to 1 month.

## MENU

### Vegetable, Beef, and Barley Soup

### Garlic-Herb Soft Pretzels

Soup and bread make for a great, filling meal wherever you find yourself. Pack a thermos of hot soup and some garlicky herb pretzels for your next tailgating party, Little League game, or school board meeting.

## Vegetable, Beef, and Barley Soup

Makes 8 to 10 cups

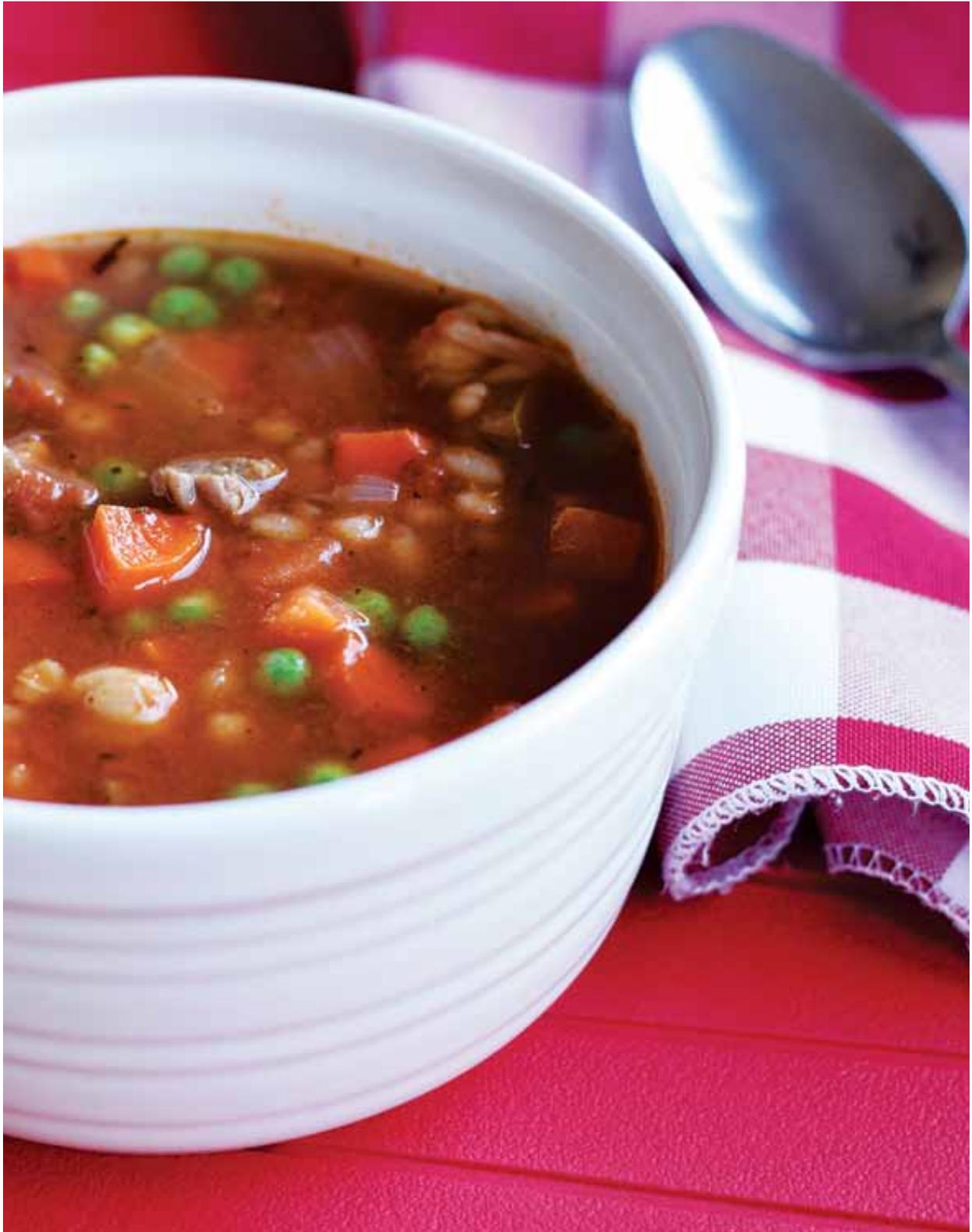
DAIRY-FREE MAKE-AHEAD FREEZER-FRIENDLY

This soup beats the canned variety by a long shot. Full of vegetables and barley, it's hearty and delicious. Freeze individual portions in freezer-to-microwave containers to pack for lunches, quick snacks, or dinners.

1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 pound chuck steak, cubed  
1 cup chopped onion  
1 cup chopped peeled carrot  
½ cup chopped celery  
½ cup pearl barley  
4 cups vegetable broth  
1 (15-ounce) can tomato sauce  
2 cups cooked or canned chickpeas (rinsed and drained if canned)  
½ cup chopped green bell pepper  
½ cup frozen petite peas, thawed  
1 teaspoon herbes de Provence  
1 teaspoon kosher salt  
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1. In a large stockpot over medium heat, heat the oil until shimmering. Brown the steak cubes on all sides for 5 minutes.
2. Add the onion, carrot, celery, and barley to the pot. Cook until the onions turn translucent, 5 to 7 minutes.
3. Stir in the broth, tomato sauce, chickpeas, bell pepper, peas, herbes de Provence, salt, and pepper. Simmer until the barley and vegetables are tender, 20 to 30 minutes.

*MAKE IT AHEAD:* Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 4 days or in the freezer for up to 1 month.



## #95

### DON'T DISMISS DELIVERY

A number of grocery stores offer free delivery service for orders placed online. The sale prices still apply, meaning you can have someone else do the shopping and driving, saving you fuel costs as well as the price of those impulse buys you just might have thrown into the cart while you were there.

## Garlic-Herb Soft Pretzels

Makes 12 pretzels

MEATLESS MAKE-AHEAD FREEZER-FRIENDLY

Soft pretzels are a tasty yet expensive treat at the mall or amusement park. In desperation, we once paid \$7—for one pretzel! These pretzels, however, are healthier, tastier, and far more economical than the commercially prepared versions. The only bad part is that you'll be hard-pressed to keep them on hand. They will disappear in a flash.

**1 cup milk**  
**½ cup water**  
**1 tablespoon honey**  
**3 cups unbleached all-purpose flour**  
**1 cup white whole-wheat flour**  
**1¼ teaspoons fine sea salt**  
**½ teaspoon garlic powder**  
**¼ teaspoon dried oregano**  
**¼ teaspoon dried basil**  
**¼ teaspoon dried parsley**  
**1 tablespoon active dry yeast**  
**¼ cup baking soda**  
**Kosher salt, poppy seeds, and/or sesame seeds, for sprinkling**

**1.** Combine the milk, water, honey, flours, salt, garlic powder, oregano, basil, parsley, and yeast in the pan of your bread machine according to the manufacturer's directions. Set to the dough cycle and start the machine. (If making the dough by hand: Combine the milk, water, and honey in a medium-size saucepan and warm slightly over medium heat. Transfer the mixture to a large bowl and add the yeast. Stir and allow the yeast to proof for 5 minutes. Add the flours, salt, garlic powder, oregano, basil, and parsley. Stir to combine well. Turn the mixture out onto a lightly floured surface and knead for 5 minutes to create a smooth, elastic dough, adding more all-purpose flour as necessary. Transfer to a greased bowl and turn the dough ball to coat. Allow to rise until doubled in bulk, about 1 hour.)

**2.** Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper or silicone baking mats. When the machine beeps or the dough has doubled in bulk, remove the dough from the pan or bowl and divide it into 12 equal parts. Roll each dough portion into an 18-inch-long rope. Shape the rope into a horseshoe. Twist the sides of the horseshoe, about halfway up, around each other twice. Flip the ends over onto the U of the horseshoe. Press to seal. Continue until all of the pretzels are shaped.



**3.** Preheat the oven to 450°F. Bring a large stockpot of water to a boil over high heat.

**4.** Add the baking soda to the pot of water, stir, and return to a boil. Drop the formed pretzels, one at a time, into the soda bath. Boil for about 30 seconds and then use a slotted spoon to transfer to the prepared baking sheets. Sprinkle the pretzels with coarse salt and/or seeds, if desired.

**5.** Once all the pretzels have been “bathed,” bake them until golden, 9 to 10 minutes. Let cool on a rack.

---

*MAKE IT AHEAD:* The baked and cooled pretzels can be wrapped individually in plastic wrap and stored in a zip-top plastic bag at room temperature for up to 3 days or in the freezer for up to 1 month. Thaw them on the counter before serving. Pretzels can be reheated in a 350°F oven for 5 minutes, if desired.

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## HOW TO HAVE A PANTRY CHALLENGE

**A** pantry challenge—cooking what’s already in your fridge, freezer, or pantry—is a great way of eating on the cheap as well as wasting less. This isn’t rocket science, but you’d be surprised to learn how many people have cupboards and freezers bursting at the seams, yet can’t figure out what to make for supper.

Believe it or not, cooking at home is easier when you’ve got a blank canvas to work from. If you can see what’s in the fridge, if you can count how many jars and cans you have, if you know what proteins you have in the freezer, then you are less likely to be overwhelmed, you’ll have a sense of what cooking resources you have at your disposal, and the cooking experience will be a lot more fun.

A pantry challenge is a focused, but limited, effort to “eat down the pantry.” Rather than buying groceries as I normally would, I focus on what we already have. I build my menus around the ingredients I’ve been avoiding using. It might be something that is cumbersome to prepare or something that I’ve been too lazy to be creative with. The pantry challenge helps me deal with those items—and teaches me not to buy them

again if they weren’t good or were too much of a pain to prepare. I end up saving money because I’m not buying more; rather, I’m using up what I’ve already purchased. And I’m learning from experience.

Savvy home cooks probably do a regular, everyday-type pantry challenge once a week. However, an extended pantry challenge, like the one I do for a month twice a year and post on my blog Good Cheap Eats, allows for a much greater turnover in your food storage, helping you to weed out items that may be close to their expiration dates as well as make the most of what you already have squirreled away for winter. Often we save things “for a rainy day” and then forget to use them!

A pantry challenge can save you money and at the same time expand your cooking horizons. Here’s how:

- 1. Eating what you have means you don’t have to buy something new.**
- 2. You will learn what *not* to buy in the future.**
- 3. You waste less.**
- 4. You must get creative in the kitchen and try new recipes.**
- 5. Purging the kitchen makes it a more fun place to cook in.**

## MENU

Poor Man's  
Chicken Caesar  
Salad

MinTea

Orange-  
Chocolate Chip  
Cookies

I was a child of the 1980s, which means that I became an adult in the '90s. And that means that I love Caesar salad. One just follows the other. Caesar salad was all the rage in the '90s, and at my house it still is. It's perfect to pack in a lunch box or to eat at home. Serve with minty iced tea and a few cookies for dessert.

## Poor Man's Chicken Caesar Salad

Serves 4

MAKE-AHEAD

In the old days, this salad was not a frugal affair, especially when you bought prepared croutons and dressing. I've cut the costs in several ways for my version. Marked-down bread from the grocery store (or leftover bread that you've got on the counter) becomes homemade croutons. The less expensive but just as flavorful Romano cheese stands in for pricey Parmigiano-Reggiano. Leftover grilled chicken adds protein to the salad and makes it a meal. I make my own dressing, and I buy the romaine lettuce on sale whenever possible. It's very little effort—and very little expense—for such huge rewards.

1 tablespoon mayonnaise, preferably homemade (page 273)

Juice of ½ lemon

1 teaspoon minced garlic

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

¼ cup olive oil

1 large head romaine lettuce, torn into bite-size pieces

2 cups chopped cooked chicken

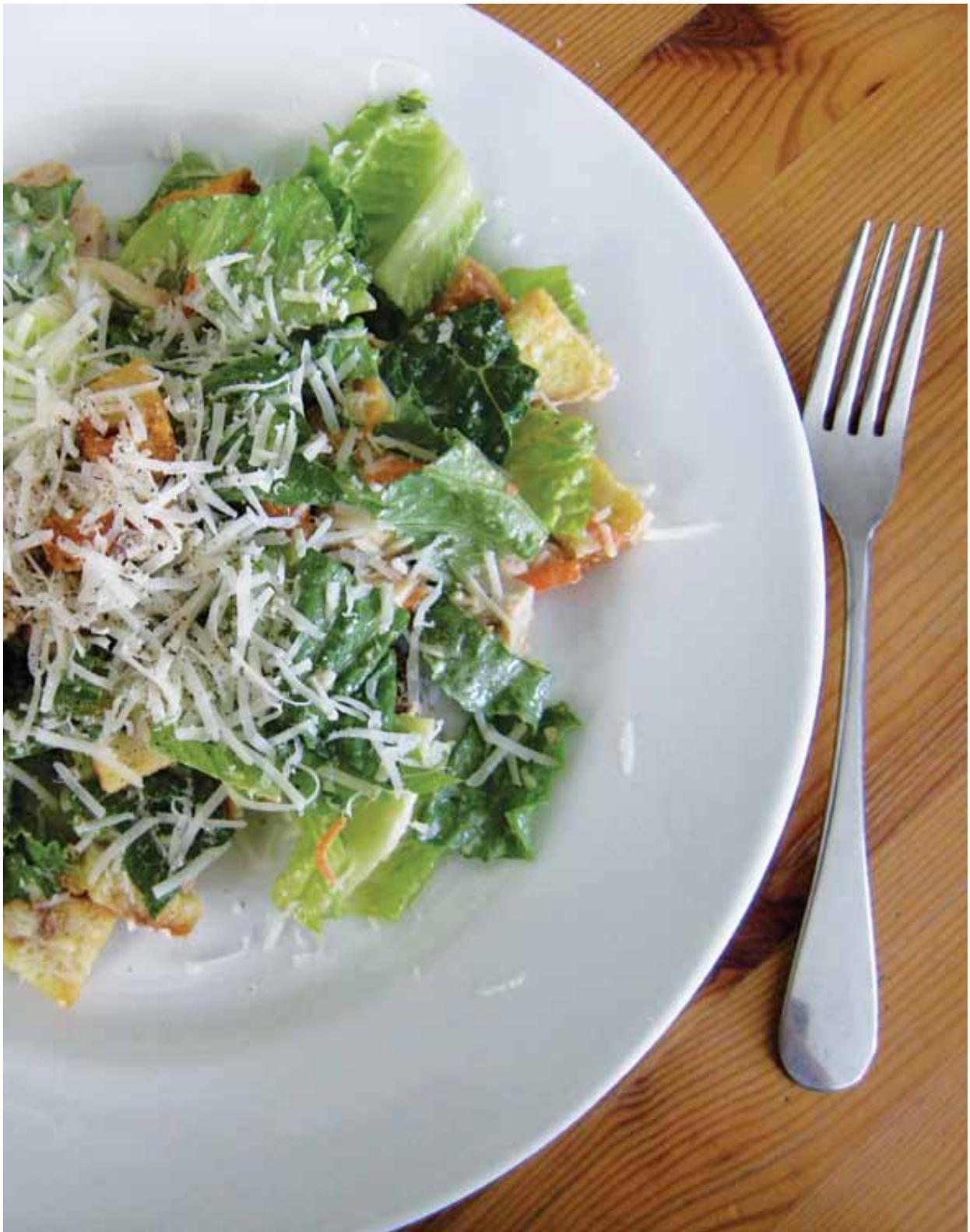
1 cup Homemade Croutons (page 296)

¾ cup shredded Romano cheese

1. In a small jar or bowl, stir together the mayonnaise, lemon juice, garlic, and salt and pepper to taste. Add the olive oil, stirring to combine well.
2. In four bowls or packable containers with lids, layer the lettuce, chicken, croutons, and cheese.
3. When ready to serve, toss the salad with the dressing. Season with additional pepper, if desired.

---

*MAKE IT AHEAD:* The salad (minus the croutons) and the dressing can be made and refrigerated separately for up to 3 days. Add the dressing and croutons to the salad right before serving.



# #98

## BREAD BONANZA

Day-old bread is a blessing in disguise. Usually stores start reducing their bread prices several days before the sell-by date. Snatch it up at low prices and turn it into all kinds of yummy goodness: croutons, French toast, bread crumbs, egg bakes, crostini, panzanella, and bread pudding.

---

## homemade croutons

Makes 2 cups

MEATLESS DAIRY-FREE MAKE-AHEAD FREEZER-FRIENDLY

I can make a gallon of croutons for about 75 cents when I buy day-old bread. It's worth the 15 minutes of effort for great-tasting salad toppings.

**2 cups bread cubes**  
**2 tablespoons olive oil**  
**¼ teaspoon dried Italian herb blend**  
**¼ teaspoon garlic powder**

- 1.** Preheat the oven to 375°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat.
- 2.** In a large bowl, combine the bread cubes and olive oil. Toss to coat. Season with the Italian herbs and garlic powder.
- 3.** Bake, stirring a couple of times to promote even browning and prevent burning, until crisp and golden brown, 10 to 15 minutes. Cool before adding to salads.

---

*MAKE IT AHEAD:* Cooled croutons can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 4 days or in the freezer for up to 1 month.

## #99

### JUST BREW IT

Homemade iced tea is an affordable and delicious alternative to expensive bottled beverages. Boxed teas go on sale or clearance often throughout the year, cutting your costs even more. Keep a pitcherful of iced tea on hand for an easy and refreshing beverage. Tote a bottle to work and on road trips to avoid pricey bottled versions.

## MinTea

Serves 4

MEATLESS DAIRY-FREE GLUTEN-FREE MAKE-AHEAD

Bottled sweet teas are expensive—and full of sugar! Save money by brewing tea at home and sweetening it yourself.

**4 black tea bags**  
**¼ cup chopped fresh mint**  
**2 cups boiling water**  
**2 tablespoons honey**  
**4 cups ice cubes**

**1.** Place the tea bags and mint leaves in a heatproof glass pitcher or bowl. Pour the boiling water over and steep for 5 minutes. Remove the tea bags and strain out the mint leaves. Stir in the honey until dissolved.

**2.** Put the ice in a large thermos. Pour the hot tea over the ice. Serve chilled.

---

*MAKE IT AHEAD:* Store the iced tea in the refrigerator for up to 4 days.



## #100

### HONEY, I SHRUNK THE CHOCOLATE

Use mini chocolate chips instead of regular-size chips to get a bigger distribution of chocolaty goodness without using more product. You will find that you can get away with using less in many of your favorite baking recipes.

## Orange–Chocolate Chip Cookies

Makes about 3 dozen cookies

MAKE-AHEAD FREEZER-FRIENDLY

These cookies are favorites at our house. They are full of flavor thanks to the chocolate, cinnamon, and orange zest. Feel free to try other combinations, such as ginger and lemon zest or dried cherries and lime zest (with or without the chocolate chips).

**1 cup (2 sticks) butter**  
**1 cup dark brown sugar**  
**½ cup granulated sugar**  
**2 large eggs**  
**1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract**  
**1½ cups rolled oats**  
**1½ cups unbleached all-purpose flour**  
**1 teaspoon baking soda**  
**1 teaspoon fine sea salt**  
**½ teaspoon ground cinnamon**  
**Grated zest of 1 orange**  
**1 cup mini chocolate chips**

- 1.** Preheat the oven to 375°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper or silicone baking mats.
- 2.** In a large bowl, cream together the butter and sugars. Add the eggs and vanilla and beat until well combined.
- 3.** Grind the oats in a blender or food processor until powdered. Add to the butter-sugar mixture along with the flour, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, and orange zest, stirring to combine. Fold in the chocolate chips.
- 4.** Place the dough by rounded tablespoons about 2 inches apart on the prepared baking sheets.
- 5.** Bake until set, 8 to 10 minutes. Cool on a rack.

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*MAKE IT AHEAD:* Store the cooled cookies in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 5 days or in the freezer for up to 1 month.

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## COOKING FOR ONE OR TWO PEOPLE

**O**bviously, I'm feeding a small army each night when I set out to prepare supper. In fact, for most of the recipes in this book, I make double batches in order to feed my family. It's clear that bulk buying serves my eight-person family well in cutting our food costs.

But what about when you're cooking for only one or two people? This can be a challenge, and it may seem much easier to just grab takeout or eat popcorn for supper. But there are tips and tricks that can help singles and couples save money.

### 1. WASTE IS YOUR ENEMY.

A huge problem throughout the United States is that we waste food. Some figures suggest that as much as 25 percent of our food spending goes directly into the trash! This is due to overbuying or cooking too much at once. We forget what we have until it's spoiled or no longer appealing. If you're cooking for one or two people and cooking standard recipes, you need to be ready to battle waste.

Pack tomorrow's lunch while you're serving up supper. That portion will be cooled and ready for the fridge by the time you're done eating the evening meal.

Practice freezer cooking. Divide large prepared recipes into smaller, dinner-size portions. Cool, wrap, and freeze.

Keep track of what you have in the refrigerator and freezer. A simple list tacked to the fridge or kept in a mobile device will remind you of what you have.

Have a pantry challenge every so often, focusing on cooking the food that you have on hand rather than going out to buy more. See page 70 for more details on how to have your own pantry challenge.

### 2. MAKE BULK BUYING WORK FOR YOU.

If you buy flour, grains, nuts, and similar items in the bulk section of the health food store, you can buy the portion that you want without worrying about it going bad before you use it up. Usually the prices are pretty competitive. The same goes for meats. Even when there were two of us, I'd still buy large packages of meat, but I'd divide them and freeze them in smaller portions.

### 3. EAT WITH FRIENDS.

Consider hosting a community meal on a regular basis. If you love to cook and enjoy good food, invite friends to join you. It's the best of both worlds. Take turns making dinner or bringing different courses. When I taught in a local high school, a friend and I would take turns bringing lunch. Tami would make lunch for us one week; the next week it would be my turn. In this way, we each enjoyed cooking; it elevated the mundane task to one of hospitality and friendship, and we wasted less food.

# About the Author



Sharon Leppellere

Jessica Fisher's two very popular blogs, *Life as Mom* and *Good Cheap Eats*, have established her as a go-to authority on cooking for a family cheaply, creatively, and nutritiously.

*Good Cheap Eats* is Jessica's third cookbook. Her bestselling first book, *Not Your Mother's Make-Ahead and Freeze Cookbook*, offered a wealth of clever ideas for feeding a family inexpensively and well. Her second book, *Best 100 Juices for Kids*, brought the juicing revolution home for the entire family, children included. A widely cited figure in the world of food blogs and "mom blogs," she has also written online for *The Kitchn*, *Life Your Way*, *Money Saving Mom*, *\$5 Dinners*, and *The Art of Simple* and in print for more than 85 regional parenting publications. Jessica's readers recognize that she walks the talk: She is the mom to, and primary cook for, four young sons and two young daughters. She lives with her husband and children in the San Diego area.

# Real Food. Really Delicious. **Totally Cheap.**

**C**an you eat well—really satisfying, nutritious dinners, bursting with flavor—for less than \$10 a meal? Jessica Fisher knows you can, because she does it all the time. In *Good Cheap Eats*, the popular food blogger and seasoned cookbook author reveals her family-tested secrets.

Faced with money and time pressures, many of us turn to fast food, takeout pizza, or over-processed foods from the supermarket. But we know we are not eating well, and eventually we realize we're wasting money, not saving it. Jessica offers a delicious alternative, with nourishing, from-scratch meals that don't break the bank or take hours to cook, including:

- **Simple Bean Tostadas, Chunky Tomato Salsa, Lemon Pie with Honey-Ginger Ice Cream**
- **Chicken Kabobs with Mint-Yogurt Sauce, Curried Couscous, Greek Spinach Salad**
- **Asian Chicken Salad with Rice Noodles, Ginger-Orange Crisps**
- **Beef Potpie with Flaky Cheddar Crust, Winter Greens and Citrus Salad**
- **Cajun Shrimp and Sausage Rice, Buttery Dill Carrots, Banana-Walnut Mini Muffins**

Each dinner feeds a family of four for ten bucks—a little more for larger families, a little less for smaller ones and singles. The menus are just suggestions, and readers can mix-and-match any of the tasty 200-plus recipes as they like. In more than 100 tips scattered through the book, Jessica distills her hard-won wisdom into a wealth of ideas for how to be a penny-wise shopper, how to find good cuts of meat that are cheap, how to reduce waste and maximize leftovers, and more. Never before has living so affordably meant living so well.



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