

GETTING DINNER ON THE TABLE...

The **SAME** Day You Homeschool



Vicki Bentley

Getting Dinner on the Table. . . The SAME Day You Homeschool

The Everyday Homemaking Series, Book 3

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Everyday Homemaking

Practical Ideas for Busy Families

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RESOURCES
family of companies...
From our family to yours!

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It was another hard day of homeschooling
at the Miller house.

From *The Official Book of Homeschooling Cartoons, Vol. 1* © Todd Wilson. Used with permission.
For more hilarious cartoons (and other resources) by Todd, visit www.familymanweb.com.

Everyday Cooking for Busy Families

A recent survey of National Merit scholars of the past twenty years revealed that one common denominator, without exception, was that they came from households who made *family dinnertime* (as in, all at the table at the same time!) a priority, even if just a three nights a week. “But,” you think, “our family is pulled in so many directions – how can we all eat together?” Or, as a busy mom, you wonder how you can clear the books *off* the dining table and get something more substantial than ramen noodles or Cheerios *on* the table in a timely manner (and still have the energy to eat it!).

If you can get supper on the table in 20-30 minutes, you are more likely to eat together and chat a bit before you divide and conquer for the evening! Here are some ideas for do-ahead meal preparation that can greatly reduce your time in the kitchen – and even the food prep can be family time, if you work together.

Earlier in the week, when you can carve out an hour or two at home:

- Cook a huge pot of **rice** and put the leftovers in zipper-seal bags in the freezer. Gently flatten the sealed bags of rice when you put them in the freezer and they will thaw faster. This is a great way to have brown rice on hand quickly in spite of a longer cooking time. Rice freezes and thaws fine; it can be thawed and warmed in the microwave, or just add it frozen to soups. By the way, brown rice has a much higher nutritional value, but if your family insists on white rice, then parboiled or converted rice is the next healthiest choice.
- Put a large pot on the stove full of water, onions, carrots, vegetable trimmings, etc. and several cut-up **chickens** or parts. Simmer for an hour (while you cook rice and chop veggies), then debone chicken, tear or chop into bite-sized pieces, and pop into zipper-seal freezer bags for future meals. Strain broth and refrigerate in jars overnight to harden any fat (remove fat before moving jars to freezer). You can also use a few jars’ worth of broth that same evening to make **chicken soup** after that tough grocery trip.
- Speaking of chicken: When I use **boneless skinless breasts**, I slice each horizontally into two thinner slices (be careful of the palm of your hand). Because I keep the width, they still look like full-sized portions, but I can feed eight people from one four-pack of breast halves, and they cook much faster because they’re thinner. It really is plenty of meat.
- The smaller you chop your meat, the farther **you can stretch it**. Instead of *chopping* chicken for enchiladas, I *mince* the same amount of chicken and can get at least five more enchiladas out of it.

- While you've got the chopper or food processor out, **chop** *several* onions or bell peppers and freeze, or a *whole bag* of nuts or shred *several pounds* of cheese or whatever. Next time, the chopping will already be done. If you plan to use them within the week, shred carrots now, too, and store in the fridge for salads and casseroles.
- Chop hard-cooked eggs, shred cheese and carrots, etc. to have on hand for **salad toppings** for the week.
- If you make **doubles** (casseroles or entrees) every day for a week, you'll have seven **extra meals** in the freezer at the end of the week. Or freeze casserole leftovers in meal-sized portions and Dad can grab lunch out of the freezer on his way out in the morning, to thaw in time for lunch.
- Freeze spaghetti sauce in zipper seal bags and lay them out on cookie sheets to freeze (even leftover "jar" sauce can be frozen like this). Because they are frozen "thin," they freeze and thaw more quickly. Same principle applies to anything I freeze – **thin means quick-thaw!**
- We are also big fans of "make a mix" cooking to make soup mixes, brownie mixes, pie crust mixes, dressing mixes, etc. so we'll have our own **homemade "convenience" foods**.
- **Homemade breads** can be made and frozen. I try to make time once a week to bake six loaves of bread (that's all that fit in my oven) and put them in the freezer in heavy plastic bags. When we want a loaf of bread (or some rolls), I take the bread out of the plastic, wrap the frozen bread in a lightweight tea towel, and microwave on HIGH for 2-3 minutes, until warm and soft throughout. Almost as good as freshly baked!
(See recipe and tutorial at http://everydayhomemaking.com/bread_recipe.)

Excerpted from *Everyday Cooking* by Vicki Bentley www.everydayhomemaking.com

Hamburger Helpers

When I come home from the grocery store with ground meat, I brown some (with onion, usually) and put in zipper-seal freezer bags. I roll some into one-inch meatballs and bake in the oven, then freeze. I make some into patties and freeze with waxed paper between (make patties large and thin for quicker thawing and cooking, or cook ahead of time, too).

Last week, I bought 15 pounds of very lean hamburger from Sam's Club (by the case with some friends at a significantly reduced price per pound – Sam's sells many meats like this if you ask). When I got home, I turned on the oven and dumped about 12 pounds into a huge bowl with four eggs, some coarsely ground oatmeal (could use quick oats), some Spike seasoning and some Veg-All seasoning (or seasoned salt, if you don't have the others), and some milk powder, plus about 1 cup of water. I "smooshed" it all up by hand till well mixed (little ones love to do this!).

I formed several meat loaves. I topped one with ketchup mixed with a little brown sugar (Sucanat) and popped it in a 350 oven with baking potatoes so dinner was now on (bake 1 hour; be sure to pop holes in your potatoes with a fork so they don't explode – the voice of experience!). The other two meatloaves I froze to be baked later; I have also done this and baked them most of the way first, so they finish cooking on "eating" day.

While dinner was baking, I formed meatballs about 1½ to 2 inches in diameter, placing them pretty close together on a jelly roll pan (I could fit about 54 meatballs on my pan). I baked those on the upper rack in the already-going oven at 350 F for about 20 minutes, then cooled them a little and froze them in baggies. They can be used later for spaghetti and meatballs, stroganoff meatballs, barbecued meatballs, sweet and sour meatballs, etc. Already cooked and ready to add to the sauces!

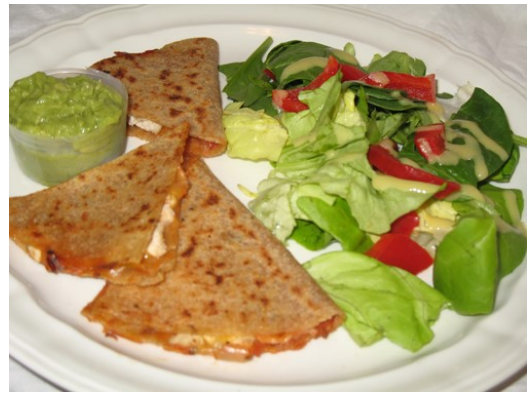


I formed some of the meat into Salisbury steak patties and quick-froze on a cookie sheet (put on waxed paper on a cookie sheet in freezer till stiff, then piled into baggies). Later, they will be all ready to brown and cook in gravy.

With the "smooshed" meat that was left, I made a pan of "porcupine" meatballs by adding some Italian seasonings, a little water, and about a half cup of uncooked rice

(can't use brown unless it's parboiled – it takes too long). I formed larger meatballs, then topped with tomato sauce and basil and froze, to be baked at a later date. They are called porcupines because the rice plumps up as it cooks and pokes out of the meatballs like little porcupine quills.

The rest of the hamburger I browned with onion in a skillet and froze in sandwich bags. *So in about one hour, I had dinner baking, plus I had at least 13 other meals on their way.*



Served with mixed greens & red bell pepper salad.

Chicken Quesadillas serves 4

2 cups cooked, finely-cubed chicken
chopped spinach (fresh, or thawed-and-squeezed-dry frozen)
8 *flour tortillas* (about 7-8 inches) [Homemade are the best]
salsa
2 cups Cheddar or Cheddar/Jack cheese (or more, to your taste)
sour cream to taste

Preheat 9"-12" skillet*. Mix spinach and chicken in a small bowl (or in the chicken's ziploc baggie, to save dirtying a bowl). Spread half of a tortilla with about a Tablespoon of salsa and put in dry, hot skillet (salsa side up). Spread that half with about 1/4 cup chicken mixture and sprinkle with 1/4+ cup cheese; fold "empty" side over the filled side. Repeat on other half of skillet with another tortilla. Cook till bottom is slightly browned, then flip to brown other side and finish melting the cheese (doesn't take long at all, maybe 30 seconds per side). I like to cut in half with the edge of the spatula before removing to a plate.

(Multiply ingredients to serve a larger crowd.)



Confetti Sausage with Rice

1 package turkey kielbasa or smoked sausage (fully cooked), sliced diagonally
½ green bell pepper,* chopped in bite-sized chunks
½ red bell pepper,* chopped
½ yellow bell pepper,* chopped
½ orange bell pepper,* chopped
1 onion, cut into bite-sized chunks
1-2 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
1 Tbsp sesame seeds
cooked rice (photo shows combination parboiled/white, though we prefer brown for maximum nutrition)

Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. Stir in onion and peppers; stir fry till crisp-tender, about three minutes. Add sausage and stir till heated and slightly browned, about three minutes. Sprinkle with sesame seeds and serve sausage and vegetables over hot, cooked rice.

*(or some portion of each pepper, according to budget!)

Easy Pizza Dough

4 cups flour 1 Tbsp yeast
pinch salt 2 cups warm water

Dissolve yeast in warm water. Stir in flour to make soft dough. Knead on oiled counter (or floured board) for 2-3 minutes. Cover and let rise 1 hour, till double. Punch down and roll out. Top as desired. Bake 10 minutes at 500.

This makes 2 fairly thin 15" pizzas (if I'm feeling really frugal, I can get 3 thin ones)
I top with 1 8oz can tomato sauce for the both of them, with Italian seasonings spread around, then freshly grated Parmesan and some shredded Mozzarella.

(Adapted from Reading Rainbow)

Our family also enjoys pizza made from my regular whole-grain bread dough, so I often make a large batch of bread dough and make two loaves' portion of dough into two large pizzas. See the recipe at www.everydayhomemaking.com.

To make pizza with less mess:

Make dough according to recipe. When pizza dough is almost ready to roll out:

1. Move oven rack to bottom shelf of oven. Put a pizza stone on the rack (I use the rectangular [Pampered Chef](#) stone).

2. Preheat oven to 500F. Yes, 500 (or even 550). If you don't have a pizza stone, I understand that you can use UNGLAZED quarry tiles (but it's probably easier to find a [Pampered Chef](#) stone!). It's important that you preheat with the stone IN the oven, not before, or you may crack your stone.



3. Roll each pizza out on a piece of baking parchment (found in the aluminum foil or cake decorating aisle of Wal-Mart) to a size crust that will fit on your stone without hanging off the edges. My daughter made a template by tracing around her stone with black marker on white paper; this shows through the parchment paper and can then be pulled out before baking. I just guess. ☺
You can roll out as many pizzas as you can put on parchment sheets around your kitchen.



4. Top pizza as desired. (Above left: Mixing Italian herbs into half a can of tomato sauce.)



5. Slide the parchment/pizza onto a rimless cookie sheet or inverted jelly roll pan (or use a pizza peel, but I already had a cookie sheet). Open the oven. Hold the cookie sheet directly in front of the baking stone and slide the parchment (with pizza) onto the preheated baking stone, being sure that all of the pizza is on top of the stone, not hanging over the edge. Remember not to touch the stone – it is very hot!

(In photo, above right, the preheated stone is directly behind the cookie sheet I have resting on the oven rack – the stone is dark and not very visible in photo. I am grasping the edge of the parchment to slide the pizza/parchment rearward onto the stone.)

6. Bake at 500F for 6-7 minutes (check for done-ness of crust—personal preference).



7. With the cookie sheet directly in front of the stone, transfer the parchment with the now-cooked pizza back onto the cookie sheet.

8. Holding the cookie sheet AND the parchment with one hand, slide the pizza onto your cutting surface. It will slide right off the parchment.

9. Discard parchment. Put cookie sheet away. Cool stone and put away. No mess.

Chops in Herbs and Wine



We rarely eat pork, but this is delicious with very thick boneless loin chops. Would also be **yummy with lamb, or chicken breasts.** (With lamb, try a red wine or grape juice.) The chops I use are very thick, so we don't eat one whole chop per person; I serve it in slices with the sauce over it, atop a bed of baby spinach leaves, with the vegetables to the side. While this can be made with dried herbs, the flavor with fresh is unbelievable!

- 4 thick boneless pork loin or lamb chops (about 1½ inches thick)
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 Tbsp spicy brown mustard
- sprig of fresh rosemary (about the size of your thumb), minced
- 2 tart apples, cut into thick slices
- 4 carrots, cut into big chunks
- 4 scrubbed potatoes, cut lengthwise into quarters
- 1 ½ cups white wine (*or cooking wine, or apple juice*)

Heat oil in pressure skillet. Spread chops with mustard and brown in hot oil till seared and golden on both sides. Lift chops, and place apples on the bottom of the pan, then replace chops on top of the apples. Pour in wine. Sprinkle chops with rosemary, then add carrots and potatoes. Seal lid and bring to 2nd red ring (high pressure) and then maintain pressure for 8-9 minutes (depending on thickness of meat). Remove from heat and depressurize naturally.

Slice chops diagonally and serve with apples and pan juices over meat, with vegetables on the side.

Not using a pressure cooker? Cook on the stovetop in a regular pan for about 25 minutes or in a covered casserole in the oven just under an hour.

Concerned about pork safety? If the inside temperature is at least 150 degrees Fahrenheit, it is considered safely cooked. I use a digital instant-read thermometer.

Quick and Easy Chicken Skillet Recipes

These recipes serve four. Adjust quantities for your family.

Put a new twist on the same old chicken breasts and add pizzazz to your meals! Just sauté chicken breasts in a jiffy, then add variety with the *sauce du jour*! For example:

Mushrooms in wine (or apple juice): After removing sautéed chicken to a platter, add to sauté pan about one cup sliced mushrooms (fresh or canned), ½ sliced green onions, a dash of salt and All-Purpose Seasoning. Stir till mushrooms are golden, then add ½ cup white wine (or apple juice) and ¾ cup chicken broth to deglaze pan. Simmer about 4-5 minutes to reduce liquid by about half. Remove from heat and stir in one handful chopped fresh spinach and a handful of grape or cherry tomatoes. Serve over chicken.

Lime/garlic sauce: After removing sautéed chicken to a platter, heat 1 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil in the sauté pan and add 3-4 cloves crushed garlic, about ¼ cup chopped red bell pepper, and one sliced onion, stirring till softened. Add the juice of one lime plus ¾ cup chicken broth to deglaze the pan of any chicken bits and garlic; simmer about 4 minutes to reduce sauce to about half. Serve over chicken breasts.

Fruity chicken: After removing sautéed chicken to a platter, add a 15-oz can of peaches in pear juice (with liquid) to the sauté pan. Cook over medium heat till slightly glazed or golden. Add ½ cup chicken broth and about 1 Tbsp chopped fresh rosemary and a handful of raisins. Simmer and stir occasionally about 4 minutes to reduce sauce. Serve over chicken breasts.

Curried chicken: After removing sautéed chicken to a platter, add to skillet: 1 Tbsp olive oil and sauté ½ onion (sliced) and 3 garlic cloves till softened. Add ¾ cup chicken broth and 1 Tbsp curry powder to deglaze pan. Stir in one chopped apple and simmer about 4 minutes to reduce by about half. After removing from heat, stir in ¼ cup plain yogurt. This is especially good over rice and the chicken breasts.

Easy Mexicali Chicken: After removing sautéed chicken to a platter, add to the skillet about 1 cup salsa (when I don't have time for homemade, I like Sam's Choice all-natural *Thick and Chunky* or *Southwest Black Bean and White Corn* salsa). Simmer until heated through. Spoon over chicken breasts and top with shredded Mexican-style cheese; serve avocado slices on the side.

Mediterranean Chicken: After removing sautéed chicken to a platter, add 1 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil to the skillet. Sauté in 3 cloves pressed garlic and ½ onion, chopped in large pieces. Add 1-2 Tbsp chopped fresh basil (or better yet, about 2 Tbsp pesto) and 2 cups chopped tomato (or use 1 can petite diced, with or without juice). Add ½ cup chicken broth and ½ cup white wine and simmer till reduced by half. Just before serving, fold in ½ cup sliced ripe olives (or more in my household!). Serve over chicken breasts.

Or use your imagination to create your own yummy sauce!

I like to serve the chicken over a small bed of fresh baby spinach. The heat of the chicken slightly wilts the spinach, and my children are more likely to eat the spinach in the sauce from the chicken.

If you are REALLY rushed, any of these would make a quick and easy accompaniment to sliced rotisserie chicken from the market!

To sauté chicken breasts: Slice 2 boneless skinless breasts in half horizontally (to make four thinner servings). Heat 1 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil over medium-high heat and add chicken, seasoning as desired (I use a hint of sea salt, a touch of pepper, and often my favorite McCormick's All-Purpose Seasoning). Cook chicken 4-6 minutes, turning once - or until lightly browned on both sides and juices run clear, not pink.

Leftover cooked chicken? A little can stretch a long way...

- Add to the salsa inside the tortillas for **quesadillas**.
- Add to salad greens with **black beans**, cherry tomatoes, and cheddar cheese.
- Sauté in pesto or drained tomatoes with herbs to serve **over whole grain pasta**.
- Stir into seasoned chicken broth; add leftover veggies and rice for a hearty **soup**.



Chicken accompanying spring greens/spinach with apple, sliced yellow and orange bell pepper, and dried blueberries, lightly dressed with raspberry vinaigrette. Top with fresh shredded Parmesan and/or walnuts and serve with whole-grain bread.

Meal Planning/ Shopping Hints

Plan your meals/menus.

Include a variety of foods, to provide balanced nutrition. According to Dr. Rex Russell's book, *What the Bible Says About Healthy Living*, three main factors in food selection should be:

1. Eat only what God intended for food.
2. Eat it as close to its original form as possible.
3. Don't make food an idol.

(His book expounds upon these, plus has lots of other great information.)

If you are having trouble coming up with menus, remember that your family is probably more impressed with eating nourishing food at a regular time each day than with trying a vast array of new foods each week.

To get into the habit of regular, healthy dinner times, consider something as basic as a weekly rotation of the same basic meals. You can work up to scheduling certain *categories* of meals on the weekdays (for example: meatless meal on Monday, poultry meal on Tuesday, ground beef meal on Wednesday, poultry on Thursday, new recipe on Friday, etc. – see chart). Then, as you are more comfortable with menu planning, you could even plan a month at a time, if you have room to store the groceries for that many meals. I have provided a few samples to get you started in my cookbook, *Everyday Cooking*, as well as here on p. 17. (Bonus: I found that when I planned/shopped for a month at a time, my cost per meal was significantly reduced.)

Grocery shop with a list.

I prefer to use a [pre-printed list](#) with my commonly used items pre-categorized. I simply check off the items I need, with quantities noted; it is simple to customize a list on your computer. You might ask your local grocery store for a map of the aisles so you can customize your shopping list to the order of the aisles in your store.

I was always terrible at trying to keep track of my grocery purchases with the calculator. I never failed to somehow lose track and get surprised at the checkout counter! I have found the following method helpful for staying on budget at the store.

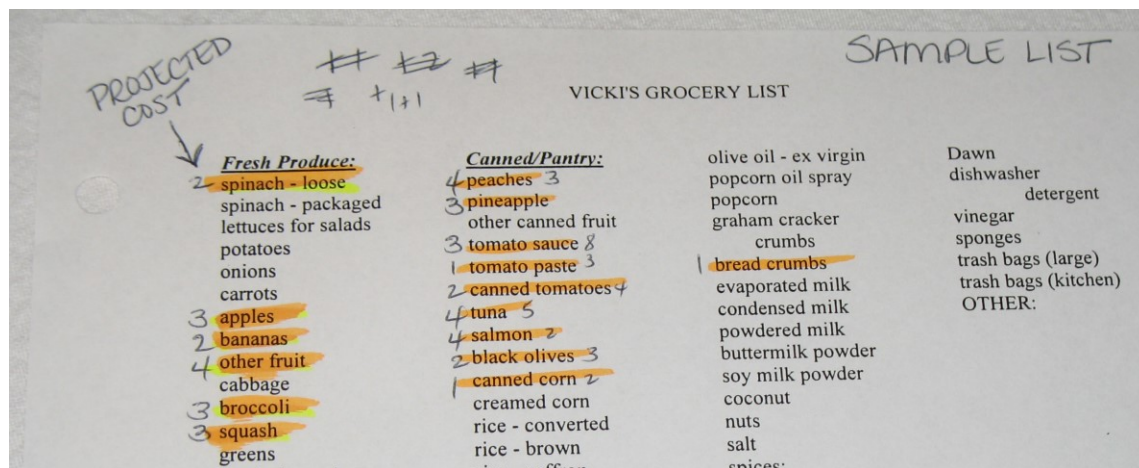
1. Determine the amount I am able to spend at the store.
2. Make my shopping list, based on my menu selections for the week/month.
3. Jot an approximate price total next to each individual list item. *These prices do NOT have to be accurate; I make a ballpark guess.* The key is to give myself a projected total figure with which to work.
4. Add up all the figures. If the total is within my budgeted amount, I am doing great. If it's over, I'll need to decide which items may be dropped; leave them

marked, but annotate them as “extras” only to be purchased if I determine later that I will have some extra at the end of the shopping trip. Remember to account for state or local sales tax.

5. At the store:

As I add items from my list to my cart, I notice the *correct* price and buy accordingly. For example, if my list says 5 cans corn - \$3 and I see on the shelf that corn is on sale, five cans for a total of \$2, I put the cans in the buggy, cross that item off my list and jot “+ \$1” at the top of my grocery list. This tells me that I now have an extra \$1 to work with as I shop. So when the next item is *bath tissue* - \$4 and I discover that it’s gone up to \$5, I can still get it; I simply cross off the \$1 at the top of the page so I know I am now “even” in my budget. If I didn’t have that \$1 extra at the top of the page, I’d have to choose less expensive bath tissue.

I always round up to dollars in my pricing, so it is not exact, but I will be likely to actually come out under my budgeted amount at the end.



Monthly menu for _____ **SAMPLE** _____

Day	Dinner Menu	Notes
Mon	Chicken schnitzel, mashed potatoes, butterbeans	Soak beans overnight
Tues	Baked beans, Parmesan greens, fruit, tortilla chips	start sprouts
Wed	Meat loaf, mashed potatoes, carrots	Bake pita bread
Thurs	Pita sandwiches	
Fri	Stuffed turkey, mashed potatoes, green beans	Debone turkey
Sat	Stuffed baked potatoes, broccoli salad	
Sun	Turkey divan, salad	
Mon	Dorito casserole	
Tues	Turkey casserole	Thaw chicken
Wed	Lemon and herb chicken, rice, Brussels sprouts	
Thurs	Teriyaki chicken, rice	
Fri	Salmon patties, fried potatoes, veg	
Sat	Pizza night (start dough at 5), salad	
Sun	Chicken enchiladas, fruit salad	
Mon	Potato soup, salad, rolls	
Tues	Easy chicken mushroom bake, sautéed vegetables	
Wed	Sloppy joes, fruit salad	
Thurs	Breast of chicken with rice, broccoli	
Fri	Macaroni and cheese with tuna, green beans, jello salad	
Sat	Chicken quesadillas, refried beans, salad	make tortillas early
Sun	Sauteed vegetables with pasta, Parmesan cheese	
Mon	Broccoli cheese soup, garlic cheese biscuits	
Tues	Porcupines, broccoli	
Wed	Lasagna, salad, rolls	defrost for crockpot
Thurs	Chicken in crockpot with vegetables	
Fri	Unstuffed cabbage casserole, fruit salad	
Sat	Brunswick stew, bread, mandarin salad	

Recipes for many of these meals can be found in *Everyday Homemaking*.

The Tortoise and the Hare Run the Dinnertime Race: Slow Cookers vs. Pressure Cookers

In the busy-ness of everyday living, it can feel like a race to get a nourishing, tasty meal on the table – sometimes it's a marathon, but more often it is a 100-yard dash! Although I enjoy the relaxation of leisurely preparing a meal, I more often rely on either the tortoise-or-the-hare approach: the slow cooker or the pressure cooker! Either one can help me provide a yummy meal for my family with minimal crunch-time involvement (although my friends know that I am much more adept with the pressure cooker than the slow cooker!).

The Tortoise

The **slow cooker** (often called a crockpot, which is actually a brand name) allows me to put dinner in the pot in the morning, leave it all day, and serve a tasty meal at suppertime! I prefer a slow cooker with a removable crockery liner for ease of cleaning. A meal that you would attend for about an hour on the stove will cook in about 6-8 hours on low in a crockpot, or about 4-5 hours on high. Most meals do best on low; some people prefer to start the pot on high to get the temperature up quickly past the minimum food safety threshold of 140 degrees.

Foods in the bottom of the cooker tend to cook more quickly, since they are immersed in the simmering liquid. Meats generally cook faster than vegetables in a crockpot, so leave veggies whole or cut into chunks and make them the first layer, with the meat on top. Your recipe may give you specific instructions on layering your ingredients; you will want to begin with thawed ingredients, so plan accordingly. Also, liquids do not evaporate away as readily as in a regular pot, so when converting recipes, reduce liquid a bit unless it's a soup, or unless the liquid is to hydrate rice or beans.

This slow cooking method tenderizes less expensive cuts of meat, thus helping to stretch my food budget dollars. One of our favorites is crockpot roast, or round steak in the slow cooker; it makes its own gravy as it cooks! Even if I prefer to cook part of my meal more conventionally, I can use the crockpot to “jump start” the main dish – for example, I have put two roasting chickens into the cooker, sprinkled them liberally with McCormick's All-Purpose Seasoning, turned the cooker on low for 7-8 hours, and come home to fall-off-the-bone seasoned chicken, ready to use in a recipe or debone into zipper-seal bags for later meals.

The Hare

The other time-saver in the kitchen is my collection of **pressure cookers**. Pressure cooking takes about one third the time of conventional pot cooking. The clamp-and-gauge pressure cooker of Grandma's era has been replaced by state-of-the-art, sleek pots with myriad safety features to give you peace of mind even “under pressure.”

I prefer a stainless steel cooker and have several sizes. Whatever size you choose, remember to fill it no more than two thirds full (minimum liquid is at least one cup, to produce steam). Once the lid is locked into place and the cooker is on high heat, the liquid inside boils and produces steam. Because the gasket produces an airtight seal, the trapped steam builds up to 15 PSI (pounds per square inch) on high, or 10 PSI on low (depending on your cooker's design). At high pressure (15, or the second red ring on my Kuhn Rikon cookers), water is boiling at 250 F instead of the typical 212, so the water is hotter than usual, hence, the faster cooking time. Most of mine are spring-valve cookers, although my larger cookers and canners are jiggle weight cookers. I have also added two electric pressure cookers to my kitchen (*see more at our [blog](#)*).

The minimum size for a family is the 4-quart cooker (or the 3.5 liter, in metric) – this is a good size for a full meal for a smaller family, or for side dishes for larger. In this cooker, I can prepare converted rice in seven minutes instead of twenty, or brown rice in twenty minutes, versus an hour in a conventional pan). Beef stew is ready in less than fifteen minutes, veggies and all.

A six-quart (or 5 liter) cooker will accommodate a nice roast or a good quantity of soup or stew. I also have a few Dutch-oven sized cookers for larger quantities of meats, or layered meal cooking – I can layer meat, potatoes, and vegetables in one pot for cooking, then remove the meat and vegetables, and mash the potatoes, all in about 20 minutes. This is a good basic “starter” size, because you can cook a smaller amount in a larger cooker, but you cannot cook a larger amount in a smaller cooker.

The Recipes

An online search for either topic turns up some helpful sites. Basic cookbooks include *Fix It and Forget It* by Dawn Ranck and Phyllis Pellman Good (for the slow cooker) and *Pressure Perfect* by Lorna Sass. And with some practice, you can convert almost any of your tried-and-true family favorites for use in either the slow cooker or pressure cooker! To show you the subtle differences, here are recipes for our chill-chasing Brunswick stew using either cooker:

Chill-Chasing Brunswick Stew

2 uncooked boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch cubes or smaller
6-8 cups water (depending on cooker size)
1 – 15 oz. can tomatoes with liquid (preferably petite diced, or crushed)
1 – 15 oz. can corn
about 1/3 cup honey barbecue sauce
1 onion, chopped
1 Tbsp vinegar
1 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce
2 Tbsp chicken broth powder or 6 bouillon cubes
2 large potatoes, cut into ½ inch cubes
1 cup brown rice
2 cups frozen baby limas (or a 10 oz package)
salt and pepper to taste
½ cup potato flakes (optional)

Combine all ingredients except the potato flakes into the crock of the slow cooker. Cover and cook on low for 8 hours.

If stew needs further thickening before serving, stir in potato flakes.

To pressure cook:

Combine all ingredients but the potato flakes in 6-quart pressure cooker. Seal and bring quickly to high pressure (2nd red ring on Kuhn Rikon cooker); reduce heat to maintain pressure at 1st red ring for about 8 minutes. Depressurize using quick-release method. Stir in potato flakes to thicken slightly.

Serves 8.

This is good with some small bite-sized chunks of uncooked pumpkin or other winter squash added to the second cooking.

In a pinch, this is really good with leftovers from a roasted chicken from the market.

To start from whole chicken:

In slow cooker:

Cook thawed chicken with some seasoning for 8 hours on low. Strain liquid and remove chicken from bones, adding back into the liquid in the pot.*

In pressure cooker:

Put leftover carcass in several cups of water in a 6-quart pressure cooker and cook at 15 lb pressure/2nd red ring for about 6 minutes, OR uncooked thawed chicken for 15 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to depressurize naturally. Strain liquid* and remove chicken from bones when cool enough to handle, adding back into the liquid in the pot to make the stew.

* I do this by inverting the pot into a colander over a large heatproof bowl in the sink. Then I pour the liquid from the bowl back into the pot on the stove (burner off). I dump the whole chicken from the colander into the now-empty bowl and cover the chicken with cold water so I can handle the chicken, and I de-bone it by hand onto the cutting board. Once I have a nice pile of meat, I chop it into small pieces and add to the stew pot.

** You can omit the potato flakes if you use creamed corn instead of whole kernel corn. Or thicken the stew slightly with a little arrowroot or cornstarch or bean flour.

Article originally published in the premier issue of *A Lady in Waiting*, a magazine for young women; reprinted with permission. (Visit www.artistryalar.com/ladyinwaiting.html)

Snack or Appetizer Ideas

Veggie wraps – Spread a whole grain tortilla with your favorite dressing or mayo/ yogurt combo and fill with lunch meat, baby spinach, or other favorite fillings. Roll up and cut into bite-sized pieces; secure each piece with a toothpick.

Fruit platter – Include a variety of bite-sized fruits and a sweet dip, such as plain yogurt flavored with honey, or ½ cup mayonnaise mixed with 8 oz. flavored yogurt.

Veggie tray – Arrange different veggies cut into a variety of shapes (carrots cut on the diagonal with a wavy cutter, yellow squash cut into broad matchsticks, cucumbers cut into rounds, broccoli cut into small florets, grape or cherry tomatoes as-is, etc.). Serve with your favorite dip.

Cranberry meatballs – Bite-sized mini-meatballs in a sauce of whole cranberry sauce and chili sauce serve well from a slow cooker on low heat.

Pita pizzas – Spread pita chips or wedges with a bit of sauce and top with part-skim mozzarella. Heat under the broiler till the cheese is bubbly.

Hummus with pita chips – Homemade or store-bought hummus served with whole grain crackers or pita chips.

English muffin pizzas – Split English muffins and top each half with a spoonful of pizza or spaghetti sauce (homemade or natural-style storebought), then top with cheese and veggies. Broil until cheese is bubbly.

Dips – Substitute plain yogurt for part or all of the sour cream.

Pizza – Cut cooked pizza into small slices, or cut out shapes with simple geometric cutters. This is good with homemade or purchased pizza.

Hot wings – Bake slightly defrosted chicken wing parts until done (about 30 minutes at 450 F). Remove from oven and bake with a glaze of 4 Tbsp hot sauce, 4 Tbsp melted butter, and 1 tsp vinegar. (Serve with a side plate of wet wipes. ☺)

Mexican dip – Layers of no-lard refried beans, no-nitrite chili (or homemade), taco seasoning, sour cream/yogurt mixture, salsa, shredded cheese, black olives, and finely chopped onion – may be served cold or heated 15 minutes in a 350 oven, accompanied by baked tortilla chips.

Easy chili-cheese dip – Soften an 8-oz package of neufchatel cheese and spread on a serving plate. Top with a can of no-nitrite chili and sprinkle with shredded cheddar or Mexican cheese. Heat in oven or microwave till cheese melts. Great with baked tortilla chips.

Crab dip – Soften an 8-oz package of neufchatel cheese and spread on a serving plate. Top with half a bottle of cocktail sauce or chili sauce, then sprinkle liberally with chopped artificial crab (which is made of fish). Serve with whole grain crackers.

Many main dishes make yummy appetizers or snacks if cut into very small portions, including rolled breads, bite-sized chicken pieces, stuffed shells, or sandwiches on small dinner rolls.

These and more appetizer ideas can be found in [Everyday Cooking](#) by Vicki Bentley. Also visit us on social media at [Everyday Homemaking](#).

The Truth about Whole Grains



100% whole-grain bread made with fresh-milled flour and other whole ingredients.

When I was introduced to the concept of *whole foods cooking*, the **first, most life-impacting change** I made was to eliminate white flour from our diets. It's not just conservative moms who are touting the health benefits of whole grains; an online search for the nutritional benefits of whole grains yields government and medical study after study heralding reduced risks for cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, gum disease, obesity, mental illness, and more, attributed to the fiber and intact nutrients (particularly the B vitamins) in whole grains.

Whole wheat contains 40 of the 44 known nutrients. God designed a wheat kernel (or any whole grain) to be the perfect long-term storage container for the nutrients, as long as the outer covering, or hull, remains intact. Once the hull is broken in the milling process, **flour loses approximately 90% of its nutritional value within 72 hours of milling**, and the wheat germ exposed to oxygen during the milling process becomes rancid without immediate refrigeration/freezing milled.

A little history

For thousands of years, flour was milled fresh daily for baking (sort of like manna – collect only what you can use in a day). At the turn of the last century, millers discovered that they could mechanically separate the germ, germ oil, and bran from the white endosperm to produce white flour with a longer shelf life than the whole grain flour they had been milling. It wasn't long before nervous system disorders such as beriberi and pellagra – caused by vitamin B deficiencies – drastically increased, so health officials, tracing the epidemic to the new white flour, appealed to the mills to return to whole wheat products. However, not only had the millers found white flour to be a profitable endeavor, they had a new, lucrative market in the animal feed industry for all the by-products.

They compromised by agreeing to replace four of the 25-30 vitamins and minerals they had removed – those most beneficial in reducing the illnesses. In short, in the refining process for white flour (and other refined grains, such as white rice), nearly all of the vitamins and minerals are removed, then four to six are replaced to "enrich" the end product. [If I took more than \$25 from you and then I gave you \$6 back, would you feel "enriched"?]

According to Rachel Ramey in *X+Y = Dinner*, besides the obvious loss of the remaining nutrients (which are not replaced), there is in most refined grain products an imbalance of nutrients because the vitamins with which the product is enriched are added in unnatural ratios; the abnormally high levels of some of these added B vitamins can cause deficiencies of others. That ruled out store-bought bread for me. Even store-bought whole-wheat flour was not an option for us, since I don't have any idea how long it's been out of their mill, but I'm fairly confident it's longer than 24-72 hours so the nutrients have pretty much oxidized away and the oils are becoming rancid.

The good news

I can make whole-grain bread with fresh, “whole” ingredients and no “stuff I don’t recognize” for **under a dollar a loaf**. Comparing this to the store price tag of the least expensive whole-grain bread in our discount grocery, a home mill pays for itself in as little as fifteen weeks, estimating that our family would consume some equivalent of one loaf of bread a day.*

I *love* having a countertop mill - we mill *what* we need *as* we need it. Lest you have visions of us taking turns at the hand crank for hours, grinding the stones to make our daily bread, I will assure you that my electric countertop micronizing mill takes up less space than my mixer, and it's so simple and convenient that we can mill enough flour in just seconds for a batch of brownies or tortillas, or in a few minutes I can mill enough flour for six loaves of bread.



To show you the size, that's my mill behind my hand; the flour canister (not shown) hooks into the hole by my finger. By the way, those are half-size loaf portions (3/4 lb each).



From top, L-R: hard white wheat, soft white wheat, hard red, spelt, kamut, quinoa, 7-grain, millet, barley, flax, white/brown/parboiled rice, oats, rye, and corn.

Because we mill our own flour quickly, easily, and inexpensively, we can use a **wide variety of grains**. Some grains found in my pantry include hard and soft white wheat, spelt, kamut, oats, rye, corn, millet, barley, quinoa, flax, brown rice, red wheat, and a seven-grain mix; I buy my grains in economical 25-to-50-lb sacks or pails from our local food co-op. Hard white wheat, spelt, and kamut are my primary bread grains because they are all high-gluten flours that make successful yeast bread. When adding low-gluten flour to a yeast bread recipe, try to keep the low-gluten flour to no more than one fourth of the flour in the recipe.

Red wheat gives more of the traditional “whole wheat” taste and darker color. Millet is high in B-17, which is thought to be beneficial in the prevention of cancer cell production. Rye should be combined with a higher-gluten grain to make a traditional rye bread. Most of your grains can be combined in appropriate proportions (at least three-fourths high-gluten grains) to make a multi-grain mixture for breads, rolls, tortillas, muffins, and more.

Soft white wheat is our main non-yeast-baked-goods flour, but we can add virtually any other grain we would like if we aren’t making yeast bread. We like to add some barley flour to the wheat when making cakes, muffins, etc. – this is closer to a “cake flour” and gives a lighter texture. When using soft white wheat or spelt, use more flour or less liquid than usual.

If I could buy only one grain, it would be hard white wheat, since it is quite multi-purpose and can replace soft wheat in my other recipes, including pancakes, cookies, muffins, and more. Hard white wheat gives me a loaf of bread that is actually lighter in color than most brands of store-bought “whole wheat” breads. With its mild color and flavor and light texture, hard white wheat (such as Prairie Gold from Wheat Montana) yields a soft, fluffy loaf of bread that most children will eat – and you can even serve peanut butter and jelly on it!. Here’s our family’s favorite basic recipe.

Don’t have a mill yet?

Other whole grain pantry items include brown rice, rolled oats, whole grain pastas and couscous, whole grain tortillas and bread products (look for stoneground whole wheat or 100% whole grain at the top of the ingredients list). Although many of the nutrients may be stripped from the processed items, you will have the benefits of the fiber. Also, many of the whole grains listed in the article can be added to a soup that cooks an hour or longer, or cooked and eaten as a side dish, cereal, or in salads. Sue Gregg has several blender batter recipes using whole grains (www.suegregg.com).

For more information and/or recipes:

Busy Woman’s Guide to Healthy Eating by Emilie Barnes and Sue Gregg

www.everydayhomemaking.com

Everyday Cooking by Vicki Bentley www.everydayhomemaking.com

Flour Power by Marleeta Basey www.everydayhomemaking.com

Introduction to Whole Foods by Rachel Ramey www.homeworksbest.net

More Than Breakfasts cookbook by Sue Gregg, from her Eating Better series

Only Real Bread is the Staff of Life seminar DVD by Sue Becker www.breadbeckers.com

X+Y=Dinner by Rachel Ramey www.homeworksbest.net

What the Bible Says about Healthy Living by Dr. Rex Russell www.everydayhomemaking.com

* *Cost was accurate at the time of publication. Cost of ingredients is subject to inflation; however, so is the cost of the loaf of storebought bread to which one would compare.

For further study:

<http://www.breadbeckers.com/enrichment.htm> (Sue Becker has a degree in food science and worked in the industry in food biochemistry.) You’ll find the numbers/percentages listed in her article.

<http://eap.mcgill.ca/Publications/EAP35.htm> - extensive studies

Although it doesn't list the 90%/72 hr part, it does stress that ground whole-grain flour can go "bad" within 2-14 days. I would love to have included the whole article here and highlighted parts. I think you'll find this article interesting.

<http://www.grainmiller.com/Tips-For-Making-Homemade-Bread.html>

<http://www.nutritionlifestyles.com/homemill.htm>

Many other articles make reference to the loss of nutrients due to oxygen exposure, although they don't specify a time period. Dr. Rex Russell also makes reference (in his book, *What the Bible Says about Healthy Eating*) to the loss of quality of stored flours, mainly referring to the rancidity of the wheat germ.

[Added later by editor: Marleeta Basey includes extensive documentation and helpful information on the nutrition of grains in her book, *Flour Power*, recently revised and re-released in 2009 (see link in box above).]

Sites were active at the time of publication.

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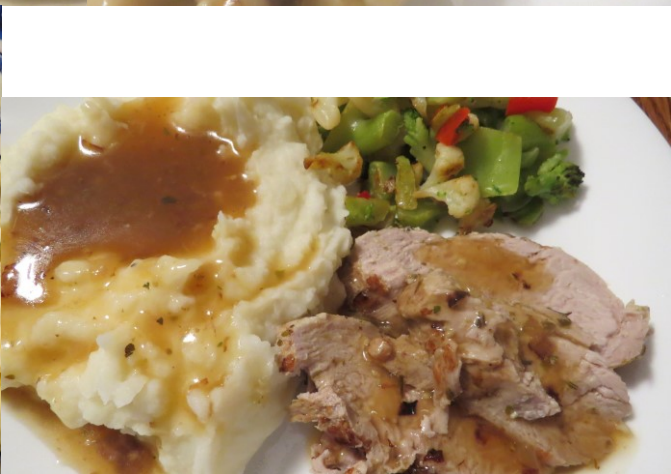
For more information, visit our blog at <http://everydayhomemaking.com/whole-grains-101/>

**See [Everyday Cooking](#) for more recipes and tips,
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