

YOUR GUIDE TO BATCH COOKING



BY IRENA MACRI

YOUR GUIDE TO BATCH COOKING

Cooking your meals throughout the day might be an option for some, but for the busiest folks, this is a luxury. That's when fast food = convenient food. When you prepare meals ahead of time, you give yourself convenient options that you can use instead of take out and cheap pre-packaged meals.

By having meals ready, you also eliminate some of the guesswork and the risk of succumbing to temptations. Sure, you may run out of a side dish before the week is over, but you can create a new one based on the protein you do have. A fridge full of leftovers is the ultimate freedom.



www.runningonrealfood.com

www.thelittlehoneybee.com

Make batch-cooking a habit

Building new habits is one of the easiest ways to eliminate old, bad habits. Meal prep doesn't need to take days. Once you begin to understand your cooking style and what organisation skills allow you to be the most productive, you could turn your batch-cooking escapades into something that takes as little as two hours.

Find a way to turn that weekly habit into something sacred. Transform your kitchen into your happy place. Pick a day when you don't have much else to do so that you're able to work without distraction. Carving out the time is half the battle!

Upgrade your tools

Having the right tools is necessary for successful and fairly easy batch cooking sessions. Even if you're working in an undesirably small space with limited countertops, the secret to efficiency in the kitchen is maximising what space you do have. Tools like food processors and Magic Bullets make chopping and shredding a breeze. Having an immersion blender or a Vitamix turns pureeing or mixing food into a painless process. Utilising a slow cooker, Instant Pot, or pressure cooker eliminates clean-up and hands-on cooking time. Using all of these things at once in addition to the stovetop and oven? Well, that's invaluable.



Prep for prep

Besides cooking all the food at once, you can choose to do a few little things that will inevitably make cooking easier down the line. For example, chopping up your stock of veggies for spontaneous dishes throughout the week eliminates half the work. Use onion and garlic a lot? Why not have them pre-diced in an airtight container. Eat salads daily? Always have a batch of salad dressing on hand. Moreover, this extra step will keep your fridge more organised so that less food goes to waste.



Image From The Paleo Party Family

Pick a theme

Besides cooking all the food at once, you can choose to do a few little things that will inevitably make cooking easier down the line. For example, chopping up your stock of veggies for spontaneous dishes throughout the week eliminates half the work. Use onion and garlic a lot? Why not have them pre-diced in an airtight container. Eat salads daily? Always have a batch of salad dressing on hand. Moreover, this extra step will keep your fridge more organised so that less food goes to waste.

Print out recipes

One of the best strategies to implement is an archive of recipes on paper – the old-fashioned way. Copy pages from your favourite cookbook or print from Pinterest, and hang up the directions on a clipboard or with magnets on the fridge. That way, it's there for hands-free, easy reference.

Learn your list

Meal prep has the ability to turn your weekly kitchen adventures into a one-day affair if you shop on the same day you prep; but you have to take into account what exactly you need to get started. Make sure your spice cabinet is stocked so you don't have to skimp on the flavour, purchase enough food to feed the amount of people you need to feed, and remember to buy those quick and easy snacks that don't need any prep work.

Choose a multi-purpose protein

If planning a catering menu each week is a little too much to handle at first, forget the idea of preparing 3-4 recipes at once. Easing into batch cooking is as simple as choosing one or two large pieces of meat that will provide adequate amounts of protein for each meal while offering up some versatility. Roast a large piece of beef brisket or a pork shoulder, then use them in salads, soups stews and breakfast fry-ups.



FOOD

Cooked poultry – chicken, duck, turkey, quail and other various poultry and game meat.

Cooked red meat – steak, rump roast, chuck roast, hamburger, lamb leg or shoulder, pork, deer (venison), and veal.

Cooked fish – salmon, tuna steaks, swordfish, various white fish.

Cooked offal – liver, heart, kidney, tongue, beef cheeks, and other various muscle/organ meats.

Cooked eggs

FREEZING TIPS

- Will last in the freezer for 4-6 months.
- Remove meat from carcass (if cooked whole) prior to freezing.
- Avoid freezing battered/fried or stuffed poultry.
- Freezes best in soups, stews, or curries (sauce/broth).
- Can be frozen raw. Lay flat in a plastic freezer bag.

- Will last in the freezer for 2-3 months.
- Freezes best in soups, stews, or curries (sauce/broth).
- Freeze slightly underdone so the meat doesn't dry while reheating.
- Freeze plain cuts of meat in between parchment paper.
- Freeze shredded meat laid flat in a plastic freezer bag.

- Avoid freezing cooked fish when possible as the taste and texture is best when cooked fresh.
- Freeze fishcakes (salmon/tuna mixtures) cooked or uncooked wrapped individually or stored between parchment paper and sealed in bags.

- Best frozen for 2-3 months
- Wrap in air-tight freezer wrap or aluminium foil before storage.
- Place individually wrapped servings in Tupperware or large freezer bags.

- Only freeze well if scrambled or used in a recipe such as muffins or fishcakes.
- Hard-cooked eggs will last for 1 week in the refrigerator.
- More about storing eggs online: bit.ly/2dxC03X

FOOD

FREEZING TIPS

Broth & Sauces – tomato sauce, bone broth, soup stock, curry sauce.

- Let cool to room temperature before freezing.
- Freeze in ice cube trays then remove when solid and transfer to containers or freezer bags.
- Freeze in mason jars leaving 1-2 inches of room at the top.

Casseroles – spaghetti squash pie, shepherd's pie, frittatas, one-pan baked dishes.

- Cook until partially done and cook all the way through after thawing/reheating
- Line baking dishes with tin foil so the food can be removed from the dish and frozen separately.

Baked goods – pastries, pies, unfrosted cakes, muffins, brownies.

- Freeze pies “assembled” but not baked.
- Freeze individual cake slices, brownies or cookies in between sheets of parchment for easy, single-serve options.
- Double wrap breads and muffins to prevent freezer burn.

Non-citrus fruits – berries, bananas, cherries, peaches, figs, nectarines

- Wash and dry before freezing.
- Freeze bananas when ripe peeled and chopped into coins or 3-4 segments.
- Freeze in bags or containers.
- Frozen fruits will work best for smoothies or cooking.

Fresh herbs – rosemary, thyme, oregano, basil, parsley, mint, dill

- Always freeze in liquid.
- Store chopped and preserved in olive oil, frozen in ice cube trays for easy cooking.

Vegetables – asparagus, green beans, broccoli, carrots, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, shelled peas, zucchini, onions

- Always blanch (cook briefly in boiling water) before freezing (3-4 minutes) followed by an ice bath (another 3-4 minutes)
- Bell peppers and onions can be chopped and frozen without blanching.

FOOD

Winter squash – acorn, butter-nut, pumpkin, delicata, kabocha

Leafy greens – spinach, kale, collard greens, beet greens, turnip greens, mustard greens, swiss chard

FREEZING TIPS

- Prepare by boiling, pressure/slow cooking, or roasting first.
- Peel skin, remove seeds, and puree before freezing.
- Preserve puree by laying it flat in plastic bags or using ice cube molds then transferring to containers.
- Blanch for 1-2 minutes before freezing.
- Remove stems before blanching and freezing.
- Freeze chopped greens in airtight bags.
- Do not freeze fresh salad greens (romaine, green leaf, endive, or any variety of lettuce)

THE DO NOT FREEZE LIST

- Cucumbers
- Watermelon
- Lettuce
- Celery
- Apples
- Grapefruit
- Oranges
- Lemons and limes
- Radishes
- Raw potatoes
- Sprouts

MEALS THAT FREEZE WELL

Soup

Soups made without dairy will freeze exceptionally well. If you plan on adding any dairy or cream, you should do so right before serving. This rule also applies to delicate ingredients added in the last few minutes of cooking such as greens or eggs.

While you can choose to freeze soups including meat, the best method is to serve up protein separate to avoid overcooking it when you heat it up.

It's best to leave some of the vegetables in the soup you're making slightly undercooked, so they have a chance to finish upon reheating. You can lay soups flat in a plastic bag after the liquid has cooled down, which will thaw easily in a bowl in the refrigerator later.



Casserole

Casseroles are great for freezing things that otherwise can't be frozen; like eggs, dairy products if tolerated, and miscellaneous foods like spaghetti squash which – after cooking – retains a lot of moisture.

Do NOT freeze casseroles with a “crumb” topping. Simply save the addition for cooking with later.

Stew and Curry

The only real caveat to freezing stew is using thickening agents. For example, wheat flour and cornstarch tend to separate upon thawing. Gluten-free options such as rice flour, tapioca starch, or arrowroot starch won't present this dilemma.

If you choose to freeze stew in an airtight container rather than a plastic bag, you should lay plastic wrap flat on top of the surface while leaving some room at the top. This will prevent vegetables from being exposed, and freezer burn.

Stews and curries are amongst the best dishes for freezing, as the flavours have time to blend together and the ingredients have time to marinate.

Pancakes and Waffles

You can definitely freeze your favourite paleo waffles and pancakes for quick and easy breakfast options. This is helpful as you can make the batter just once and cook in bulk.

Freeze laying flat on a baking sheet or in between sheets of parchment, and store in an airtight container. It's best to use these up within 1-2 months of freezing. Stews and curries are amongst the best dishes for freezing, as the flavours have time to blend together and the ingredients have time to marinate. plastic bag after the liquid has cooled down, which will thaw easily in a bowl in the refrigerator later.