

# BUDGET MEAL PLAN

Follow the checklist and notes below so you can move through this prep plan as quickly and efficiently as possible!

For any finer details, make sure to watch the accompanying video.

## Step 1: Set the scene

I like to blow through the prep plans one week a time. I set up as much as I possibly can first, then methodically work my way down the list of one week's meals.

Occasionally, if I'm feeling sharp, I'll prep a week by prepping like with like, then dividing. For example, I'll prep ALL the meat, then divide it into freezer bags or containers. Then I'll do ALL the vegetables, etc.

However! This is really only best if you've got a great chunk of time where you know you won't get distracted and thrown off course.

You can totally do it that way! But I'll warn you: if there's a chance you'll get distracted, or kids are in the house, or you may not have all the time you think you do to make all the meals; this method can trip you up.

With that in mind, I'll walk you through each week at a time.

**Here are the recipes for this week's prep plan, in the order we'll be making them. Gather the recipes to keep on hand:**

**Potato and Sausage Chowder**

**Bean and Ham Soup**

**Garlic and Balsamic Chicken**

**Ropa Vieja**

**Tikka Masala**

## Step 2: Check your modifications

# BUDGET MEAL PLAN

If you plan on using any of the recommended modifications in each recipe, get those ready now. You can either prepare those ingredients ahead of time, or make a mark on your recipe to recognize the modification as you move through the prep plan.

Here are the recommended modifications:

**Potato and Sausage Chowder:** If you're going dairy-free, swap the heavy cream for a plant-based yogurt that will add thickness without the sour taste of regular yogurt. If you're skipping the meat, just swap in the same amount of vegan sausage, prepared the same way.

**Bean and Ham Soup:** If you're not using ham in this recipe, swap in 5-6 portobello mushroom caps, stems removed and roughly diced. It'll add an earthy, meaty flavor that will replace the salty meat flavor from the ham.

**Garlic and Balsamic Chicken:** If you're not using chicken, sub 5-6 portobello caps, sliced into halves or thirds. Other additions instead of chicken can be zucchini rounds or extra-firm tofu, cooked separately and then tossed in at the end to coat with sauce. *Note:* Tofu is only a swap if you're making this dish on the stovetop; it'll fall apart on the grill.

**Ropa Vieja** To make this meat-centric dish meat free, swap the chuck roast for 14.5 ounces canned chickpeas and 16 ounces sliced oyster mushrooms. Decrease the cooking time to 2 hours in the slow cooker or 15 minutes in the Instant Pot with a natural pressure release.

**Tikka Masala:** Don't want the chicken? Swap in cauliflower florets, cooked lentils, or chickpeas.

## Step 3: Start with the cooked items first

Most of the recipes in these prep plans call only for assembling of ingredients; all cooking will be done on the day you eat the meal. However, a few require cooking of a few ingredients beforehand, so start those items first.

Here are the recipes with cooking prep:

**Potato and Sausage Chowder:** Boil water and add half the potatoes.

## Step 4: One by one, work your way down the list

# BUDGET MEAL PLAN

Once the cooking prep has begun, you can start prepping the remaining recipes! Follow along with the video if you've got questions about each recipe; I've listed their video start times below so you can fast forward/rewind as needed.

**Potato and Sausage Chowder (.30)**

**Bean and Ham Soup (11.00)**

**Garlic and Balsamic Chicken (12.45)**

**Ropa Vieja (18.35)**

**Tikka Masala (22.02)**

**Step 5: Add the labels, making notes as needed**

Did you add bouillon cubes? Is there a change in the cook time? Do you want to make sure this meal gets cooked in the Instant Pot and not the slow cooker? Add your labels and make sure any reminders are included.

**Step 6: Store meals in the freezer**

(or refrigerator, if you'll be eating them within 5 days)

If freezing, lay flat in the freezer so they can be stacked.

Make sure to add any water amounts needed for bags with bouillon cubes inside.

If preparing as a freezer kit, staple the other ingredients together to note on the bag what is required upon thawing.

# BUDGET MEAL PLAN

NOTES:

# BUDGET MEAL PLAN

## POTATO AND SAUSAGE CHOWDER: PREP CHECKLIST

Another cheap, filling soup that lasts for days and tastes even better in the fridge! This one is thickened with extra-starchy yellow potatoes, which break down to provide creamy backbone to this soup.

### Supplies needed:

- Chef's knife
- Vegetable peeler
- Cutting board
- Freezer-safe gallon ziplock bags
- Measuring cup and spoons

### To cut and prepare:

- Peel 4-5 large potatoes (about 1 pound) and cut in half or quarter, til they are about the same size each. Bring 3 cups water to a boil and add potatoes. Boil until they are soft and fall apart easily when pricked with a fork, then drain from the water and add to the bag or container
- Roughly dice the remaining potatoes
- Peel and dice onion
- Peel and dice carrot
- Peel and chop the garlic
- Strip the leaves from thyme branches
- Slice the sausage into ½" rounds

### Mix:

- Add the pre-cooked potatoes to the bag or container and lightly mash with a fork or spoon. Add the remaining vegetables and sliced sausage to the bag or container, including bouillon cubes or broth (if using) and other seasonings.

### Label instructions:

*Slow cooker:* Thaw as needed. Add water as needed for bouillon, if using. Combine all ingredients in slow cooker and cook low for 4hours, high for 3, until the sausage is completely cooked through and the vegetables are soft and cooked through.

*Instant Pot:* Thaw as needed. Add water as needed for bouillon, if using. Cook on High Pressure for 20 minutes with a natural pressure release.

*Stovetop:* Thaw as needed. Add water as needed for bouillon, if using. Cook on medium-low, stirring often, until beans are cooked through and the vegetables have cooked to soft, about 5-6 hours.

# BUDGET MEAL PLAN

## Potato and Sausage Chowder: RECIPE

This hearty and filling soup is another one that lasts for days and tastes better as it ages. Peeling the potatoes is a personal preference; I like to peel the potatoes that will be mashed and leave the peels on the others; the skin of yellow potatoes is very thin, so I don't mind the texture. If you don't like the peels, feel free to peel all the potatoes. I recommend using yellow (sometimes called golden) potatoes here over russet (aka Idaho); it's a starchier potato so they cook up smooth and creamy, adding a great backbone to the soup. If you only have russet on hand, peel all the potatoes as they have a thicker skin that can affect the texture of the soup. *Modification Notes:* If you're going dairy-free, swap the heavy cream for a plant-based yogurt that will add thickness without the sour taste of regular yogurt. If you're skipping the meat, just swap in the same amount of vegan sausage, prepared the same way.

### *Ingredients:*

- 1 large yellow onion, peeled and diced
- 4-5 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
- 2 large carrot, peeled and diced
- 2 tablespoons thyme leaves
- 4 pounds yellow potatoes
- 2 cups fresh spinach leaves
- 6 cups vegetable or chicken broth
- ½ cup heavy cream (or plant-based yogurt; see modification note)
- 1 pound sweet sausage, sliced into ½" rounds

### *Method:*

Peel 4-5 large potatoes (about 1 pound) and cut in half or quarter, til they are about the same size each. Bring 3 cups water to a boil and add potatoes. Boil until they are soft and fall apart easily when pricked with a fork, then drain from the water and add to the bag or container. If peeling the second half of the potatoes (see prep list note) then do so; otherwise, roughly dice the remaining potatoes and add to the bag.

Add remaining ingredients to bag or container.

*Slow cooker:* Thaw as needed. Combine all ingredients in slow cooker and cook low for 5 hours, high for 3, until the sausage and vegetables are cooked through and soft.

*Instant Pot:* Thaw as needed. Cook on High Pressure for 20 minutes with a natural pressure release.

*Stovetop:* Thaw as needed. Cook on medium-low, stirring often, until sausage and vegetables are cooked through and soft, about 2-3 hours.

---

# BUDGET MEAL PLAN

## BEAN AND HAM SOUP: PREP CHECKLIST

This soup is cheap, filling, tastes even better the day after it's made, and it's super customizable with rot vegetables you may have on hand. I'll add in turnips, parsnips, and others to hearty up this soup- so have fun with it! You can also speed up the cooking time of this recipe by using cooked beans- see below for instructions.

### Supplies needed:

- Chef's knife
- Cutting board
- Freezer-safe gallon ziplock bags
- Measuring cup and spoons

### To cut:

- Peel and dice onion
- Peel and chop the garlic
- Peel and dice carrot
- (if using) Remove stems from the portobello mushroom and chop into a rough dice

### Mix:

- Add vegetables, dried beans, ham (or mushrooms), liquid, and seasonings to bag or container and stir to mix, then seal and label.

### Label instructions:

*Slow cooker:* Thaw as needed. Add water for bouillon, if using. Combine all ingredients in slow cooker and cook low for 8 hours, high for 6, until the beans are cooked through. For pre-cooked beans, cook low for 3 hours and high for 2 until vegetables are soft.

*Instant Pot:* Thaw as needed. Add water for bouillon, if using. Cook on High Pressure for 45 minutes with a natural pressure release. If using pre-cooked beans, cook on high for 15 minutes with a natural pressure release.

*Stovetop:* Thaw as needed. Add water for bouillon, if using. Cook on medium-low, stirring often, until beans are cooked through and the vegetables have cooked to soft, about 5-6 hours.

# BUDGET MEAL PLAN

## Bean and Ham Soup: RECIPE

If you're using dried beans in this recipe, be prepared to be patient- the time it will take to cook the beans from dried often depends on their age, size, and how long they have been dried. Use the cooking times below as a starting point and be ready to add more time to cook as needed. You can cut down the cooking time by using canned, pre-cooked beans.

*Modification note:* If you're not using ham in this recipe, swap in 5-6 portobello mushroom caps, stems removed and roughly diced. It'll add an earthy, meaty flavor that will replace the salty meat flavor from the ham.

### *Ingredients:*

2 large carrots, peeled and diced  
1 large yellow onion, peeled and diced  
4-5 cloves garlic, peeled and minced  
3 tablespoons fresh oregano leaves, roughly chopped (if using dried, use only 2 tablespoons)  
2 cups dried Great Northern Beans  
1 cup dried black beans  
6 cups vegetable or chicken broth  
2lb bone-in ham shank  
(if using) 5-6 portobello mushroom caps, stems removed and roughly diced

### *Method:*

*Slow cooker:* Thaw as needed. Combine all ingredients in slow cooker and cook low for 8 hours, high for 6, until the beans are cooked through and the vegetables are soft and cooked through. If using pre-cooked beans, cook low for 3 hours and high for 2 until vegetables are soft and cooked through.

*Instant Pot:* Thaw as needed. Cook on High Pressure for 45 minutes with a natural pressure release. If using pre-cooked beans, cook on high for 15 minutes with a natural pressure release.

*Stovetop:* Thaw as needed. Cook on medium-low, stirring often, until beans are cooked through and the vegetables have cooked to soft, about 5-6 hours.

---

# BUDGET MEAL PLAN

## **GARLIC-BALSAMIC CHICKEN SHISH KEBAB KIT: PREP CHECKLIST**

Another GREAT shish kebab recipe (besides the satay shish kebabs in the Vegan Prep Plan), this simple sauce is great on the grill or the stovetop. This recipe calls for chicken with button mushrooms; if you don't want to use chicken, omit it and instead swap the button mushrooms for hearty portobello caps, sliced in half or thirds

### **Supplies needed:**

- 10-12 wooden skewers
- Chef's knife
- Cutting board
- Freezer-safe gallon ziplock bags

### **To cut:**

- Red onion, cut in large 2-3" chunks
- Chicken, in 2-3" bite-sized pieces
- (if using in place of chicken) portobello mushroom caps, sliced in half or thirds

\*\*Add vegetables to large freezer-safe gallon ziplock bag as they are cut.

### **Mix:**

- Marinade ingredients (to be used as marinade: add to bag with vegetables and chicken)
- Marinade ingredients (as extra basting sauce: place in its own bag)

### **Add:**

- (optional) one bag of skewers

### **Label instructions:**

- Thaw as needed, then skewer vegetables, alternating one by one on the skewers. Use the second bag of sauce to baste with while cooking. Cook on the stovetop or on a grill until soft and cooked through, about 5-8 minutes over medium heat.

# BUDGET MEAL PLAN

## Garlic-Balsamic Chicken Shish Kebab Meal Kit: RECIPE

This meal also works great as a plain stovetop meal without skewers; pour all ingredients, including basting sauce, into a pan and cook over medium-low heat for 15-18 minutes, stirring often, until the chicken is cooked through.

*Modification Notes:* If you're not using chicken, sub 5-6 portobello caps, sliced into halves or thirds. Other additions instead of chicken can be zucchini rounds or extra-firm tofu, cooked separately and then tossed in at the end to coat with sauce. *Note:* Tofu is only a swap if you're making this dish on the stovetop; it'll fall apart on the grill.

### *Ingredients:*

#### *For the skewers:*

2-3 large red onion, sliced into quarters  
12-14 large button mushrooms, stem removed  
12-14 grape tomatoes  
2 pounds chicken breast, cut into 2-3" bite-sized pieces  
(if using) 5-6 large portobello caps, sliced in half or thirds

#### *For the garlic-balsamic sauce:*

1/2 cup balsamic vinegar  
3 garlic cloves, minced  
3 tablespoons olive oil  
1 tablespoon brown sugar  
1 tablespoon whole grain mustard

### *Method:*

*Note: If using wooden skewers, soak them in water 3-5 minutes while you are preparing the ingredients before cooking.*

1. Slice vegetables and chicken and place in a large freezer-safe ziploc bag.
2. Add the marinade ingredients into a container with a tight fitting lid and shake vigorously until the oil and vinegar have combined and emulsified. Alternatively, you can mix them in a blender or with a handheld mixer until emulsified.
3. Pour half the marinade ingredients over the chicken and vegetables. Reserve the other half, still in the tightly sealed container, to use as a baste when the skewers are cooking.
4. Label and freeze up to 3 months. When ready to use, thaw everything as needed, then skewer the ingredients from the marinade bag, alternating each ingredient on the skewer.
5. Cook on a grill or stovetop 3-5 minutes on high heat, until the vegetables have cooked soft and the chicken, if using, is cooked through. Use the second container of the marinade to baste with as you cook.

# BUDGET MEAL PLAN

## ROPA VIEJA: PREP CHECKLIST

Rope Vieja is a Cuban dish of stewed meat with vegetables. It's cheap, stretches great, and it's fabulous with rice, noodles, in a sandwich, and a multitude of other areas. Pop this in the crockpot and let it simmer all day- it will also make your whole kitchen smell incredible.

### Supplies needed:

- Chef's knife
- Cutting board
- Freezer-safe gallon ziplock bags
- Measuring cup and spoons

### To cut:

- Peel and dice onion
- Peel and chop the garlic
- Deseed and dice bell pepper
- Rub beef all over with salt and pepper until it is lightly coated

### Mix:

- Add vegetables, beef, liquid, and seasonings to bag or container and stir to mix, then seal and label.

### Label instructions:

*Slow cooker:* Thaw as needed. Combine all ingredients in slow cooker and cook low for 5 hours, high for 3, until the beef is cooked through and the vegetables are soft and cooked through.

*Instant Pot:* Thaw as needed. Cook on High Pressure for 45 minutes with a natural pressure release.

*Stovetop:* Thaw as needed. Cook on medium-low, stirring often, until beef is cooked through and easily shredded and the vegetables have cooked to soft, about 3-4 hours.

# BUDGET MEAL PLAN

## Ropa Vieja: RECIPE

Rope Vieja is a Cuban dish of stewed meat with vegetables. It's cheap, stretches great, and it's fabulous with rice, noodles, in a sandwich, and a multitude of other areas. It's classically served with black beans and plantains, either pureed or sauteed, but you can also serve it over rice, noodles, mashed potatoes, or any other starch.

This recipe calls for green olives without getting clear; that's on purpose. To be fair, you can use any pitted olives; I personally prefer calvestrano olives for their meaty flavor, but you can use Spanish olives, pimento olives (leave the pimento in!), or even black olives if that's all you have.

*Modification Notes:* To make this meat-centric dish meat free, swap the chuck roast for 14.5 ounces canned chickpeas and 16 ounces sliced oyster mushrooms. Decrease the cooking time to 2 hours in the slow cooker or 15 minutes in the Instant Pot with a natural pressure release.

### *Ingredients:*

- 3 pounds chuck roast, rubbed all over with Kosher salt and ground black pepper
- 1 large yellow onion, peeled and diced
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled and roughly chopped
- 1 large bell pepper, deseeded and diced
- 1 28 ounce can whole peeled tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- ½ cup diced green olives
- 2 teaspoons white vinegar
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon sweet or smoked paprika

### *Method:*

*Slow cooker:* Thaw as needed. Combine all ingredients in slow cooker and cook low for 5 hours, high for 3, until the beef is cooked through and the vegetables are soft and cooked through.

*Instant Pot:* Thaw as needed. Cook on High Pressure for 45 minutes with a natural pressure release.

*Stovetop:* Thaw as needed. Cook on medium-low, stirring often, until beef is cooked through and easily shredded and the vegetables have cooked to soft, about 3-4 hours.

---

# BUDGET MEAL PLAN

## CROCKPOT TIKKA MASALA: PREP CHECKLIST

My family loves this simple tikka masala, which is easy enough to throw together on a weeknight and comes together quickly. It's also great with any number of swappable proteins if you prefer not to use chicken; I've included a number of vegetarian options in the recipe.

### Supplies needed:

- Chef's knife
- Cutting board
- Freezer-safe gallon ziplock bags
- Measuring cup and spoons

### To cut:

- Peel and dice onion
- Peel and mince garlic
- Peel and grate ginger
- Cut chicken, if using, 2-3" bite-sized pieces

### Mix:

- Remaining ingredients inside the bag or container, then add the vegetables and protein.

### Label instructions:

*Slow cooker:* Thaw as needed. Combine all ingredients in slow cooker and cook low for 4 hours, high for 3, until the chicken is cooked through and the vegetables are soft and cooked through.

*Instant Pot:* Thaw as needed. Cook on High Pressure for 20 minutes with a natural pressure release.

*Stovetop:* Thaw as needed. Cook on medium-low, stirring often, until chicken is cooked through and the vegetables have cooked to soft.

Serve over rice.

# BUDGET MEAL PLAN

## Tikka Masala: RECIPE

This tikka masala is a classic Indian recipe, although the jury is out as to whether it's truly authentic or not. Regardless, it's super easy to put together and tastes even better as it sits, making it a great weeknight dish that can be turned into leftovers the next day.

*Modification Notes:* Don't want the chicken? Swap in cauliflower florets, cooked lentils, or chickpeas.

### *Ingredients:*

1 large yellow onion, peeled and diced  
4 cloves garlic, peeled and minced  
6 ounces fresh ginger, peeled and grated (about 2 tablespoons)  
1.5 pounds boneless, skinless chicken, cut into 2-3" pieces  
2 tablespoons tomato paste  
1 28 ounce can crushed tomatoes  
½ cup yogurt (dairy or plant-based)  
1 tablespoon garam masala  
1 teaspoon ground cumin  
1 teaspoon ground turmeric  
1 teaspoon crushed cardamom pods  
¼ teaspoon salt

### *Method:*

*Slow cooker:* Thaw as needed. Combine all ingredients in slow cooker and cook low for 4 hours, high for 3, until the chicken is cooked through and the vegetables are soft and cooked through.

*Instant Pot:* Thaw as needed. Cook on High Pressure for 20 minutes with a natural pressure release.

*Stovetop:* Thaw as needed. Cook on medium-low, stirring often, until chicken is cooked through and the vegetables have cooked to soft.

Serve over white or brown rice.