

Use Evernote for Your Entire Meal Planning System

I use (and adore) Evernote, the cloud-based note taking app. It's powerful, with great search and tagging features, and for a small monthly fee I can store EVERYTHING in there. I've got lists of restaurants to try, lists of the items I store at my parent's house so I don't have to pack as much when we visit, and pictures of the labels of my favorite bottles of wine, so I can remember what I drank! (We've all been there).

Evernote is also where I store my recipes - even the ones in physical, hard copy cookbooks.

If you want to go cloud-based, there are other great options, too, like Google Drive and Dropbox. The important thing is, being able to access these recipes anywhere, and on any internet-enabled device.

How to Get Started with Evernote

If you're new to Evernote, [you can download the app](#) and get started for free.

Once you've set up your account, I recommend installing the Evernote Web Clipper on your computer's browser.

You download the web clipper at www.evernote.com/webclipper, and it will give you the option to download based on the browser you are using, like Chrome, or Safari, or Firefox.

The Web Clipper is an extension for your browser, which means that whenever you stumble across a recipe online, you just click the little Evernote icon in the upper right hand corner of your browser, tell it which folder you want the recipe saved in, and it will save the entire recipe in

a file on that folder.

Here's what that extension looks like:

After the Web Clipper Extension is installed, make sure you've got Evernote on your phone or tablet. Install the app from the app store, and set it up using your account details. Now, if you find a recipe while you're on your phone, just click the option to "share", as if you're sending the page as a text message or to a social media account. The icon for Evernote will appear, and you can click it and save it to your files that way.

Here's How You Set Your Evernote Up:

With Evernote, you create "Note Stacks". Think of this setup as a filing cabinet; a Note Stack is the drawer in that filing cabinet labeled "Recipes" filled with folders labeled with type: Dinner, Breakfast, 30 Minute, and so on.

Note Stacks organize this virtual filing cabinet within your Evernote app so that when you need a recipe, you can easily sort through your folders to find it, and you can save recipes you find to their appropriate folder all with a few quick touches or swipes.

To make a Note Stack:

Take It Step By Step:

- First, create a Folder for, say, Dinner Recipes. To do this in the app, tap the Notebook with a plus sign in the upper right hand corner, create your folder title, and hit 'Ok'. To do this in the software/desktop app, click "File" in the upper lefthand corner.

- Select 'New Notebook' and label it with your category. Do this a second time with a different category- this time we'll use 'Breakfasts' as an example.

Once you have two notebooks that need to be 'stacked' together (as in, placed in the same 'drawer'), you can create a Note Stack.

- To create a note stack, drag one folder to the other until the first folder is highlighted.

This will automatically nest the folders into a Stack that can then be renamed.

- Rename the Stack 'Recipes' or similar, and congratulations! You've created your first Note Stack!

From here, add as many Notebooks as you need to fill the categories you cook from.

Now, we'll start saving recipes to the correct notebooks. **We'll start with online recipes.**

Take It Step By Step:

- Open up your Pinterest boards, bookmarks, and favorite recipe websites online.
- Go through each area where you have recipes stored online, and one-by-one, add them to your Evernote either with the Web Clipper from your desktop, or by the 'sharing' option on your smartphone.
- Add each recipe to the correct folder. You can tag each recipe if you'd like, too.

I know this part of the project seems daunting, if you break it into small tasks it's much more manageable! I would spend about 15-20 minutes each night before bed while I watched TV, going through my Google Drive, bookmarks, my hard drive, etc and one-by-one moved my saved recipes into Evernote. You'll be surprised at how quickly you can tackle this; I had hundreds of recipes and I got it done in a few days.

Once online recipes are organized, it's time for the physical recipes in cookbooks, magazines, and recipe notecards.

Again, I broke this project up into small tasks over the course of a few days and tackled it methodically. This went a lot quicker than my online recipes, to be honest.

See, Evernote's search functionality is such so that it scans not just text, but text in an image.

This way, even if your recipes are saved snapshots of a magazine, for instance, Evernote will still be able to find it even without a comment or a title added. It "sees" the text in an image, and pulls it up for you just like it does a typed recipe. Pretty cool, huh!?

So for a few days in the morning one summer, while my kids ate breakfast, I paged through my favorite cookbooks and, using the camera icon from within the Evernote app, snapped photos of the recipes I loved (you can snap a photo or use Evernote's scanner functionality to do this). As I took each photo, I added it to the folder for its meal type.

Here's What That Looks Like:

Take It Step by Step

- Open Evernote and tap the plus sign in the lower left hand corner
- Select 'Camera' from popup option
- The camera will open; use this to take a photo of your recipe. Ee the green box that appears, wiggling around your recipe? That means Evernote is trying to use the camera as a scanner. You can arrange the box to snap the recipe as a scan, or you can just snap a photo - either one works!

Now, whenever I'm writing out my meal plan, I'll first look into the fridge or cupboard to see what we have that should be used up this week. Then, I go to my Evernote file and search for those ingredients using the tags I've added. The hard work is done and now the whole process literally takes 5-10 minutes!

Maybe a cloud-based app isn't for you. But I do implore you to get as many of your favorite recipes into one place as possible; you won't believe how much easier it makes recipe searching. You can do this the old fashioned way, with notecards; you can create a binder you can save them to a different app or in a folder on your computer hard drive. Whatever works for you, having all your recipes available will make meal planning a snap!