

THE HEALTHY HOMESTEADER

Kitchen Club

October 2026 Recipe Booklet

Cozy, Comforting, Made for October

31 dinners, slow cooker Mondays and taco Tuesdays all month

Plus 10 SOS Dinners and a full Fall Baking collection

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THURSDAY OCTOBER 1 DINNER

Cheeseburger Soup

Time: 40 minutes · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

11/2 pounds ground beef
1 onion, diced
2 carrots, diced
2 celery stalks, diced
3 garlic cloves, minced
2 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
4 cups beef broth
1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1 cup whole milk
2 tablespoons cornstarch
2 cups freshly shredded cheddar

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Brown beef in a large pot over medium heat for 6–8 minutes; drain excess fat.
2. Add onion, carrots, and celery. Cook 5 minutes, then stir in garlic for 30 seconds.
3. Add potatoes, broth, salt, pepper, and mustard. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer 15–20 minutes, until potatoes are tender.
4. Whisk milk and cornstarch, stir into soup, and simmer 2–3 minutes to thicken.
5. Remove from heat and stir in cheddar until melted. Taste for salt.

Megan's Tip: Shred the cheddar yourself so it melts smoothly. Add a splash of broth if the soup thickens as it sits.

FRIDAY OCTOBER 2 DINNER

Baked Ham and Cheese Sliders

Time: 30 minutes · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

12 slider rolls
11/4 pounds fully cooked sliced ham
8 ounces Swiss or cheddar, sliced
4 tablespoons butter, melted
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1/2 teaspoon onion powder

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9 × 13-inch pan.
2. Keep rolls connected and slice horizontally. Set bottoms in pan, layer ham and cheese, and replace tops.
3. Mix butter, Dijon, Worcestershire, and onion powder. Brush evenly over rolls.
4. Cover with foil and bake 15 minutes. Uncover and bake 7–10 minutes, until hot throughout and golden. Cut into sliders.

Megan's Tip: Add a tray of apple slices and crunchy vegetables for a complete, low-effort dinner.

SATURDAY OCTOBER 3 DINNER

Million Dollar Chicken Casserole

Time: About 55 minutes · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds boneless chicken breasts, sliced into 1/2- to 3/4-inch-thick cutlets
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
8 ounces cream cheese, softened
1/2 cup sour cream
1/3 cup chicken broth
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 teaspoon onion powder
1 cup shredded cheddar
1/2 cup grated Parmesan
1 cup panko breadcrumbs
3 tablespoons butter, melted
Chopped parsley, optional

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oven to 375°F. Grease a 9 × 13-inch pan. Arrange chicken in an even layer and season with salt and pepper.
2. Mix cream cheese, sour cream, broth, garlic, onion powder, cheddar, and Parmesan. Spread over chicken.
3. Cover with foil and bake 25 minutes.
4. Mix panko and melted butter. Uncover casserole, sprinkle with crumbs, and bake 15–20 minutes more, until chicken reaches 165°F and topping is golden. Rest 5 minutes; garnish if desired.

Megan's Tip: Serve with steamed green beans and rice to catch the creamy sauce.

SUNDAY OCTOBER 4 DINNER

Baked Pumpkin French Toast Casserole

Time: 15 minutes prep, 25–30 minutes soaking, 45–55 minutes baking · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

10 cups sturdy bread cubes
8 large eggs
2 cups whole milk
1 cup pumpkin purée
1/3 cup pure maple syrup
2 teaspoons vanilla
2 teaspoons cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
1/4 teaspoon fine salt
2 tablespoons butter, for pan
Maple syrup, for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Butter a 9 × 13-inch pan and add bread.
2. Whisk eggs, milk, pumpkin, maple syrup, vanilla, spices, and salt. Pour over bread and press cubes gently into custard.
3. Soak 25–30 minutes, or cover and refrigerate overnight.
4. Heat oven to 350°F. Bake 45–55 minutes, until center is set and reaches 160°F; cover loosely if top browns early. A chilled casserole may need longer.
5. Rest 10 minutes before cutting. Serve with maple syrup and eggs or bacon if desired.

Megan's Tip: Use slightly stale bread so it absorbs the custard without turning mushy.

MONDAY OCTOBER 5 DINNER

Crockpot White Bean and Sausage Soup

Time: 15 minutes prep; 6–7 hours LOW or 3–4 hours HIGH · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

1 pound mild Italian sausage
1 onion, diced
3 carrots, diced
2 celery stalks, diced
4 garlic cloves, minced
3 cans (15 ounces each) white beans, drained and rinsed
1 can (14½ ounces) diced tomatoes with juices
4 cups chicken broth
1 teaspoon dried thyme
½ teaspoon dried oregano
½ teaspoon black pepper
1 tablespoon lemon juice
Kosher salt, to taste
Parmesan and bread, for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Brown sausage in a skillet 6–8 minutes, breaking it apart. Drain excess fat.
2. Transfer to a 6-quart slow cooker with onion, carrots, celery, garlic, beans, tomatoes, broth, thyme, oregano, and pepper.
3. Cover and cook on LOW 6–7 hours or HIGH 3–4 hours, until vegetables are tender.
4. Mash about ½ cup of the beans into the broth for body. Stir in lemon juice and salt to taste. Serve with Parmesan and bread.

Megan's Tip: A little lemon at the end brightens the soup without making it taste lemony.

TUESDAY OCTOBER 6 DINNER

Crispy Chicken and Cheese Tacos

Time: 30–35 minutes · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

1½ pounds boneless chicken thighs or breasts, finely diced
2 tablespoons oil, divided
1 teaspoon chili powder
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon kosher salt
½ teaspoon smoked paprika
½ teaspoon garlic powder
2 tablespoons water
12 corn tortillas
2 cups shredded Monterey Jack or cheddar
Salsa and sour cream, for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add chicken and seasonings. Cook 7–9 minutes, stirring, until chicken reaches 165°F.
2. Stir in water, scrape up browned bits, and transfer chicken to a bowl.
3. Warm tortillas under a damp paper towel in the microwave until pliable. Divide chicken and cheese among them and fold.
4. Add remaining oil to skillet as needed. Cook tacos in batches over medium heat 2–3 minutes per side, until crisp and cheese melts. Serve with toppings.

Megan's Tip: Warm tortillas before folding so they do not split. Keep the first batch warm in a low oven.

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 7 DINNER

One-Pot Beef Stroganoff

Time: 30 minutes · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

11/2 pounds ground beef
1 onion, diced
8 ounces mushrooms, sliced, optional
3 garlic cloves, minced
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1/2 teaspoon paprika
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
12 ounces dry egg noodles
4 cups beef broth, plus more as needed
3/4 cup sour cream
Kosher salt, to taste
Chopped parsley, optional

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Brown beef in a large deep pot 6–8 minutes; drain excess fat.
2. Add onion and optional mushrooms. Cook 4–5 minutes, then add garlic for 30 seconds.
3. Stir in Worcestershire, Dijon, paprika, pepper, broth, and noodles. Bring to a simmer.
4. Simmer uncovered 10–12 minutes, stirring often, until noodles are tender. Add broth in small splashes if the pot dries before noodles finish.
5. Remove from heat and stir in sour cream. Season with salt and garnish if desired.

Megan's Tip: Add sour cream after turning off the heat to keep the sauce smooth.

THURSDAY OCTOBER 8 DINNER

Crockpot French Dip Sandwiches

Time: 10 minutes prep; 8–9 hours LOW · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

3 pounds boneless chuck roast
1 large onion, sliced
4 garlic cloves, minced
3 cups beef broth
2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
1 tablespoon tamari or soy sauce
1 teaspoon dried thyme
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
5 hoagie rolls
10 slices provolone

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Put onion in a 6-quart slow cooker. Set roast on top.
2. Add garlic, broth, Worcestershire, tamari, thyme, and pepper. Cover and cook on LOW 8–9 hours, until beef shreds easily; extend cooking if needed.
3. Shred beef and return to juices. Taste broth for seasoning.
4. Split rolls, add drained beef and provolone, and broil 1–3 minutes, watching closely, until cheese melts. Serve cooking juices in small bowls for dipping.

Megan's Tip: Chuck roast works especially well because it becomes tender during the long cook.

FRIDAY OCTOBER 9 DINNER

BBQ Chicken Cornbread Skillet

Time: 40 minutes · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

11/2 pounds boneless chicken, diced
1 tablespoon oil
1/2 onion, diced
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1 cup corn
1 can (15 ounces) black beans, drained and rinsed
3/4 cup barbecue sauce
1/2 cup water
1 cup shredded cheddar
1 cup cornmeal
1 cup all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon fine salt
1 large egg
1 cup milk
1/4 cup melted butter
1 tablespoon honey, optional

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oven to 400°F. Heat oil in a deep 12-inch ovenproof skillet. Cook chicken, onion, and kosher salt 8–10 minutes, until chicken reaches 165°F.
2. Stir in corn, beans, barbecue sauce, and water; bring to a simmer. Sprinkle with cheddar.
3. Whisk cornmeal, flour, baking powder, and fine salt. In another bowl mix egg, milk, butter, and optional honey. Stir wet into dry just until combined.
4. Spoon batter over hot filling. Bake 18–23 minutes, until cornbread is golden and a toothpick in the topping comes out clean. Rest 5 minutes.

Megan's Tip: If your skillet is not ovenproof, transfer the hot filling to a greased 9 × 13-inch pan before adding batter.

SATURDAY OCTOBER 10 DINNER

Ham and Cheese Stuffed Meatloaf

Time: 20 minutes prep; 65–75 minutes baking · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds 85/15 ground beef
2 large eggs
3/4 cup milk
1 cup plain breadcrumbs
1/2 small onion, finely diced
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
6 ounces sliced fully cooked ham
6 ounces Swiss or provolone
1/3 cup ketchup
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1 teaspoon maple syrup

For sides

2 pounds potatoes, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 pound carrots, cut into sticks
2 tablespoons oil
3/4 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oven to 375°F. Mix eggs, milk, breadcrumbs, onion, garlic, Worcestershire, salt, and pepper. Gently mix in beef.
2. Press two-thirds of mixture into a 9 × 5-inch loaf pan, forming a well with substantial sides and bottom. Fold ham and cheese into the center, keeping them away from edges. Cap with remaining beef and seal edges.
3. Mix ketchup, Dijon, and maple syrup; spread over top. Bake 65–75 minutes, until ground beef reaches 160°F. Check the beef rather than only the cheese filling.
4. Toss side vegetables with oil, salt, and thyme on a separate sheet pan. Roast during the final 35–40 minutes, turning once, until tender.
5. Rest meatloaf 10 minutes; carefully drain excess juices and slice.

Megan's Tip: Keep a solid layer of beef around the filling so the cheese stays inside.

SUNDAY OCTOBER 11 DINNER

Homemade Drop Biscuits and Sausage Gravy

Time: 30–35 minutes · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

Biscuits

2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1 teaspoon kosher salt
6 tablespoons cold butter, cubed
1 1/4 cups buttermilk

Gravy

1 pound breakfast sausage
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
3 cups whole milk
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
kosher salt to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oven to 425°F and line a baking sheet. Whisk biscuit flour, baking powder, and salt. Cut in butter until pea-sized pieces remain. Stir in buttermilk just until combined.
2. Drop 10 mounds onto sheet and bake 15–18 minutes, until golden and baked through.
3. Meanwhile brown sausage in a skillet 7–8 minutes. Leave about 2 tablespoons rendered fat; drain excess, or add a little butter if sausage is very lean.
4. Sprinkle gravy flour over sausage; stir 1 minute. Gradually stir in milk. Simmer 5–7 minutes, stirring, until thickened. Add pepper and salt to taste.
5. Split biscuits and spoon gravy over them.

Megan's Tip: Gravy thickens as it stands. Stir in a little milk to loosen it before serving.

MONDAY OCTOBER 12 DINNER

Crockpot Ham and Cheesy Potatoes

Time: 15 minutes prep; 5–6 hours LOW or 3–4 hours HIGH · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

2 1/2 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1 1/4 pounds fully cooked ham, diced
1 small onion, diced
3/4 cup chicken broth
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
4 ounces cream cheese, softened and cubed
1/2 cup sour cream
1 1/2 cups shredded cheddar
Kosher salt, to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Grease a 6-quart slow cooker. Add potatoes, ham, onion, broth, garlic powder, and pepper; stir.
2. Cover and cook on LOW 5–6 hours or HIGH 3–4 hours, until potatoes are completely tender.
3. Stir in cream cheese and sour cream. Cover 10–15 minutes, then stir until smooth.
4. Top with cheddar and cover 5–10 minutes to melt. Taste before adding salt; ham can be salty. Serve with vegetables or fruit.

Megan's Tip: Cut potatoes evenly and keep the pieces small so they soften on schedule.

TUESDAY OCTOBER 13 DINNER

Crockpot Beef Taco Soup

Time: 15 minutes prep; 4–6 hours LOW or 2–3 hours HIGH · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 pounds ground beef
1 onion, diced
1 bell pepper, diced
3 garlic cloves, minced
1 can (15 ounces) black beans, drained and rinsed
1 can (15 ounces) pinto beans, drained and rinsed
1 can (28 ounces) diced tomatoes with juices
1 cup corn
3 cups beef broth
2 teaspoons chili powder
2 teaspoons cumin
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon kosher salt, or to taste
1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
Cheddar, sour cream, and tortilla chips, for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Brown beef in a skillet 7–9 minutes; drain excess fat. Add onion and pepper and cook 3 minutes; stir in garlic.
2. Transfer to a 6-quart slow cooker. Add beans, tomatoes, corn, broth, and seasonings.
3. Cover and cook on LOW 4–6 hours or HIGH 2–3 hours, until vegetables are tender. Taste and adjust salt.
4. Serve with cheddar, sour cream, and crushed tortilla chips.

Megan's Tip: Set out toppings so everyone can finish their own bowl.

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 14 DINNER

Mac and Cheese Bake with German Sausage

Time: 45 minutes · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

12 ounces dry short pasta
1 1/4 pounds German sausage
3 tablespoons butter
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
3 cups whole milk
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
2 1/2 cups shredded cheddar
Kosher salt, to taste
1/2 cup breadcrumbs
2 tablespoons melted butter, for topping

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oven to 375°F. Grease a 9 × 13-inch pan. Boil pasta 2 minutes less than package directions; drain.
2. If sausage is raw pork, beef, or elk sausage, cook completely to 160°F before slicing; raw poultry sausage needs 165°F. If fully cooked, slice and brown in a skillet. Set aside.
3. Melt 3 tablespoons butter in skillet. Whisk in flour for 1 minute, then gradually whisk in milk. Simmer 3–5 minutes until slightly thickened.
4. Remove from heat. Stir in Dijon, garlic powder, pepper, and cheddar. Taste for salt. Fold in pasta and sausage; transfer to pan.
5. Mix breadcrumbs with 2 tablespoons melted butter and sprinkle over casserole. Bake 15–20 minutes, until bubbling and golden.

Megan's Tip: Check the sausage label: German sausage can be raw or fully cooked, and the prep changes accordingly.

THURSDAY OCTOBER 15 DINNER

Chicken Pot Pie Biscuit Bake

Time: 50 minutes · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds boneless chicken, diced
1 tablespoon oil
4 tablespoons butter
1 onion, diced
3 carrots, diced small
2 celery stalks, diced
3 garlic cloves, minced
1/3 cup all-purpose flour
2 1/2 cups chicken broth
1/2 cup milk
1 cup frozen peas
1 teaspoon dried thyme
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon black pepper

Biscuits

2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon fine salt
6 tablespoons cold butter
1 cup buttermilk

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oven to 400°F. In a deep 12-inch ovenproof skillet, heat oil and cook chicken 7–9 minutes to 165°F. Transfer to a plate.
2. Melt 4 tablespoons butter in skillet. Cook onion, carrots, and celery 6–8 minutes. Add garlic for 30 seconds and flour for 1 minute.
3. Gradually stir in broth and milk; add thyme, salt, and pepper. Simmer 4–5 minutes until thickened. Return chicken and add peas.
4. For biscuits, whisk flour, baking powder, and fine salt. Cut in cold butter, then stir in buttermilk just until combined.
5. Drop 8–10 biscuit mounds over hot filling. Bake 20–25 minutes, until biscuits are golden and cooked through. Rest 5 minutes.

Megan's Tip: A greased 9 × 13-inch pan also works: transfer the hot filling before adding biscuits.

FRIDAY OCTOBER 16 DINNER

Chicken Bacon Ranch Flatbreads

Time: 30 minutes · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

5 individual flatbreads
1 1/2 pounds boneless chicken, diced
1 tablespoon oil
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
8 slices bacon
2 cups shredded mozzarella or Monterey Jack

Ranch spread

1/2 cup sour cream
1/4 cup mayonnaise
1 teaspoon dried dill
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon onion powder
1 teaspoon lemon juice
pinch of salt

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oven to 425°F. Cook bacon until crisp; drain and crumble.
2. Heat oil in a skillet. Season chicken with salt and pepper and cook 7–9 minutes, until it reaches 165°F.
3. Mix all ranch spread ingredients. Arrange flatbreads on baking sheets and spread with ranch.
4. Top with chicken, bacon, and cheese. Bake 8–12 minutes, until cheese melts and edges are crisp.

Megan's Tip: Use leftover cooked chicken when you have it, and skip the chicken skillet step.

SATURDAY OCTOBER 17 DINNER

Crockpot Ravioli Lasagna

Time: 20 minutes prep; 21/2–31/2 hours LOW · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

1 pound ground beef
1/2 onion, diced
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 jars (24 ounces each) marinara
2 packages (24 ounces each) frozen cheese ravioli
1 cup ricotta
2 cups shredded mozzarella
1/2 cup grated Parmesan
1 teaspoon Italian seasoning

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Brown beef and onion in a skillet 7–9 minutes; drain excess fat. Stir in garlic for 30 seconds.
2. Grease a 6-quart slow cooker. Spread 1 cup marinara over bottom.
3. Layer half the frozen ravioli, beef, ricotta, mozzarella, and remaining sauce; repeat. Sprinkle Parmesan and Italian seasoning over top.
4. Cover and cook on LOW 21/2–31/2 hours, checking at 21/2 hours. Ravioli should be tender and center piping hot. Rest 10–15 minutes before scooping.

Megan's Tip: This is a short slow-cooker recipe. Start it in the afternoon rather than leaving it on all day.

SUNDAY OCTOBER 18 DINNER

Apple Cinnamon Pancakes

Time: 35–40 minutes · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

21/2 cups all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons sugar
1 tablespoon baking powder
2 teaspoons cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon fine salt
2 large eggs
2 cups milk
4 tablespoons melted butter, plus a little for the griddle
1 teaspoon vanilla

Apple topping

3 apples, peeled and diced
2 tablespoons butter
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
2 tablespoons maple syrup
Maple syrup, eggs, or bacon, for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cook topping apples in 2 tablespoons butter over medium heat 6–8 minutes, until tender. Stir in topping cinnamon and maple syrup; keep warm.
2. Whisk flour, sugar, baking powder, cinnamon, and salt. Separately whisk eggs, milk, melted butter, and vanilla.
3. Stir wet into dry just until combined. Rest batter 5 minutes.
4. Heat a lightly buttered griddle over medium heat. Cook 1/4-cup portions 2–3 minutes, until bubbles form and edges set. Flip and cook 1–2 minutes more.
5. Serve pancakes with warm apples and maple syrup. Add eggs or bacon for dinner.

Megan's Tip: Keep finished pancakes in a 200°F oven while cooking the rest. Makes about 16 pancakes.

MONDAY OCTOBER 19 DINNER

Crockpot White Chicken Chili

Time: 15 minutes prep; 6–7 hours LOW or 3–4 hours HIGH · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds boneless chicken thighs
2 cans (15 ounces each) white beans, drained and rinsed
1 onion, diced
1 can (4 ounces) mild diced green chiles
3 garlic cloves, minced
3 cups chicken broth
2 teaspoons cumin
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon kosher salt, or to taste
1 1/2 cups corn
4 ounces cream cheese, softened and cubed
1 tablespoon lime juice

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Put chicken, beans, onion, chiles, garlic, broth, cumin, oregano, and salt into a 6-quart slow cooker.
2. Cover and cook on LOW 6–7 hours or HIGH 3–4 hours, until chicken reaches 165°F and shreds easily.
3. Shred chicken. Mash about 1/2 cup beans against side of cooker for body.
4. Stir in corn and cream cheese; cover 15–20 minutes until hot, then stir smooth. Add lime juice and taste for seasoning.

Megan's Tip: Use mild chiles for a family-friendly bowl; anyone who wants heat can add it at the table.

TUESDAY OCTOBER 20 DINNER

Beef and Sweet Potato Tacos

Time: 30–35 minutes · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

1 pound sweet potatoes OR Yukon Gold potatoes, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
2 tablespoons oil, divided
3/4 teaspoon kosher salt, divided
1 1/2 pounds ground beef
1/2 onion, diced
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 teaspoons chili powder
1 teaspoon cumin
1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
1/4 cup water
12 corn tortillas
Cheddar, salsa, and sour cream, for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oven to 425°F. Toss potatoes with 1 tablespoon oil and 1/4 teaspoon salt on a baking sheet. Roast 20–25 minutes, turning once, until tender; regular potatoes may need a few extra minutes.
2. Heat remaining oil in a skillet. Brown beef and onion 7–9 minutes; drain excess fat.
3. Add garlic, chili powder, cumin, paprika, remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt, and water. Simmer 2–3 minutes.
4. Fold roasted potatoes into beef. Warm tortillas and serve with filling and toppings.

Megan's Tip: If your family does not like sweet potatoes, swap in regular potatoes using the same amount and cube size.

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 21 DINNER

Creamy Chicken and Rice Casserole

Time: 15 minutes prep; about 60–70 minutes baking · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cups uncooked long-grain white rice
2 pounds boneless chicken thighs, diced
1 small onion, finely diced
2 carrots, finely diced
3 garlic cloves, minced
3 cups chicken broth, plus a splash if needed
2 tablespoons butter, cut into pieces
1 teaspoon dried thyme
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
4 ounces cream cheese, softened and cubed
1 cup shredded cheddar

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oven to 375°F. Grease a 9 × 13-inch pan.
2. Combine rice, chicken, onion, carrots, garlic, broth, butter, thyme, salt, and pepper in pan. Cover tightly with foil.
3. Bake 50–55 minutes. Check that rice is tender and chicken reaches 165°F. If rice is firm, add a small splash of hot broth if needed, reseal, and bake another 10 minutes; repeat as needed.
4. Stir in cream cheese until melted. Sprinkle cheddar over top and bake uncovered 5–10 minutes. Rest 5 minutes.

Megan's Tip: Use regular long-grain white rice here; brown or instant rice needs a different liquid ratio and cooking time.

THURSDAY OCTOBER 22 DINNER

Crockpot Loaded Baked Potato Soup

Time: 15 minutes prep; 6–7 hours LOW or 3–4 hours HIGH · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

2 1/2 pounds russet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1 onion, diced
3 garlic cloves, minced
4 cups chicken broth
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
8 slices bacon
1 cup whole milk
1/2 cup sour cream
1 1/2 cups shredded cheddar
Kosher salt, to taste
Sliced green onions, for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Add potatoes, onion, garlic, broth, and pepper to a 6-quart slow cooker. Cover and cook on LOW 6–7 hours or HIGH 3–4 hours, until potatoes are very tender.
2. Cook bacon until crisp; drain and crumble.
3. Mash about one-third of the potatoes in the cooker. Stir in milk, sour cream, and cheddar.
4. Cover on LOW 10–15 minutes until hot and melted, stirring once. Avoid boiling after adding dairy. Taste for salt.
5. Serve topped with bacon and green onions.

Megan's Tip: Mash more potatoes for a thicker bowl; add a little broth if you prefer it thinner.

FRIDAY OCTOBER 23 DINNER

Crispy Oven Wings and Potato Wedges

Time: 15 minutes prep; 40–45 minutes baking · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

4 pounds chicken wings, separated into flats and drumettes
1 tablespoon aluminum-free baking powder, NOT baking soda
1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
2 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, cut into wedges
2 tablespoons oil
3/4 teaspoon kosher salt, for potatoes
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder, for potatoes
Favorite dipping sauce, optional

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oven to 425°F. Line two large rimmed sheet pans; set an oven-safe rack on the wing pan if available.
2. Pat wings very dry. Toss with baking powder, 1 1/2 teaspoons salt, garlic powder, paprika, and pepper. Arrange in a single layer with space between pieces.
3. Toss wedges with oil, potato salt, and potato garlic powder; spread on the second pan.
4. Bake 40–45 minutes, flipping wings and wedges and rotating pans halfway through. Check potatoes at 35 minutes. Wings must reach at least 165°F and be crisp; allow more time as needed.
5. Serve with dipping sauce and crunchy vegetables.

Megan's Tip: Dry wings and space between them are the biggest help for crisp skin.

SATURDAY OCTOBER 24 DINNER

Crockpot Mississippi Roast with Buttered Noodles

Time: 10 minutes prep; 8–9 hours LOW · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

3 pounds boneless chuck roast
1 onion, sliced
1/2 cup beef broth
1/4 cup pepperoncini brine
6–8 pepperoncini peppers
2 tablespoons ranch seasoning
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
2 tablespoons butter
12 ounces egg noodles
1 tablespoon butter, for noodles
Kosher salt and black pepper, to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place onion in a 6-quart slow cooker and set roast on top.
2. Add broth, pepperoncini brine, peppers, ranch seasoning, Worcestershire, and 2 tablespoons butter.
3. Cover and cook on LOW 8–9 hours, until roast shreds easily. Extend cooking if still firm.
4. Shred beef into juices and taste before adding salt.
5. Cook noodles according to package directions; drain and toss with 1 tablespoon butter. Serve beef and juices over noodles.

Megan's Tip: Ranch seasoning and brine already bring salt, so season at the end.

SUNDAY OCTOBER 25 DINNER

Giant Cinnamon Rolls

Time: About 25 minutes prep; 11/2–13/4 hours rising; 24–26 minutes baking · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

Dough

2 cups whole milk
1/2 cup softened butter
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon instant yeast
2 large eggs
6 cups all-purpose flour

Filling

1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons softened butter
1 1/4 cups packed brown sugar
1 1/2 tablespoons cinnamon

Glaze

2 ounces cream cheese, softened
2 1/4 cups powdered sugar
3 tablespoons melted butter
1 teaspoon vanilla
2–3 tablespoons milk

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Warm milk until steaming but not boiling. Stir in dough butter, sugar, and salt; cool until comfortably warm, about 105–110°F.
2. Mix in yeast and eggs, then flour. Knead 2–3 minutes until a soft, slightly sticky dough forms. Cover and rise about 1 hour, until doubled.
3. Roll dough to an 18 × 12-inch rectangle. Spread with filling butter, then sprinkle with mixed brown sugar and cinnamon.
4. Roll up from a long edge and cut into 12 rolls. Place in a greased 9 × 13-inch pan or a rimmed sheet pan with room to rise. Cover and rise 30–45 minutes until puffy.
5. Heat oven to 350°F. Bake 24–26 minutes, checking that center rolls are cooked through; allow extra time if needed and cover loosely if browning early.
6. Beat glaze ingredients until smooth, adjusting milk for spreading consistency. Spread over warm rolls. Serve with eggs or sausage for dinner.

Megan's Tip: Makes 12 large rolls. For overnight prep, refrigerate shaped rolls covered, then let them become puffy before baking; timing depends on room temperature.

MONDAY OCTOBER 26 DINNER

Crockpot Chicken and Noodles

Time: 15 minutes prep; 6–7 hours LOW or 3–4 hours HIGH, plus noodles · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds boneless chicken thighs
1 onion, diced
3 carrots, sliced
2 celery stalks, sliced
3 garlic cloves, minced
4 cups chicken broth, plus more if needed
2 tablespoons butter
1 teaspoon dried thyme
1 teaspoon kosher salt, or to taste
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
12 ounces dry egg noodles

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Put chicken, vegetables, garlic, broth, butter, thyme, salt, and pepper into a 6-quart slow cooker.
2. Cover and cook on LOW 6–7 hours or HIGH 3–4 hours, until chicken reaches 165°F and shreds easily.
3. Shred chicken and return to cooker. Switch to HIGH and let broth get hot and bubbling.
4. Stir in noodles, cover, and cook about 20–30 minutes, stirring and checking early, until tender. Add hot broth if needed.
5. Serve promptly; noodles continue soaking up broth as they stand.

Megan's Tip: For the most predictable noodle texture, cook them separately and stir into the finished chicken mixture.

TUESDAY OCTOBER 27 DINNER

Regular Ground Beef Tacos

Time: 20 minutes · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 pounds ground beef
1/2 onion, diced
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 teaspoons chili powder
1 1/2 teaspoons cumin
1 teaspoon paprika
1 teaspoon kosher salt, or to taste
1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
1/2 cup water
12 tortillas or taco shells
Shredded cheese, lettuce, salsa, and sour cream, for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Brown beef and onion in a skillet over medium heat 7–9 minutes; drain excess fat.
2. Add garlic and cook 30 seconds.
3. Stir in chili powder, cumin, paprika, salt, oregano, and water. Simmer 3–5 minutes, until saucy rather than watery.
4. Warm tortillas or shells according to package directions. Fill and serve with toppings.

Megan's Tip: Set out a small topping bar and let everyone assemble their own dinner.

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 28 DINNER

One-Pot Creamy Sausage Tomato Pasta

Time: 30 minutes · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

1 1/4 pounds mild bulk Italian sausage
1 small onion, diced
4 garlic cloves, minced
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1 can (14 1/2 ounces) diced tomatoes with juices
2 1/2 cups chicken broth, plus more as needed
12 ounces dry short pasta
3/4 cup heavy cream
1/2 cup grated Parmesan
1/2 teaspoon Italian seasoning
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
Kosher salt, to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Brown sausage in a large deep pot 6–8 minutes, breaking it apart; drain excess fat.
2. Add onion and cook 3–4 minutes. Stir in garlic and tomato paste for 1 minute.
3. Add diced tomatoes, broth, pasta, Italian seasoning, and pepper. Bring to a simmer.
4. Simmer uncovered 10–15 minutes, stirring frequently, until pasta is tender. Add broth in small splashes whenever the pan gets dry before pasta finishes.
5. Reduce heat to low and stir in cream and Parmesan. Warm gently 2 minutes and taste for salt.

Megan's Tip: Keep an eye on the pasta as it cooks; different shapes absorb broth at different rates.

THURSDAY OCTOBER 29 DINNER

Crockpot Marry Me Chicken

Time: 10 minutes prep; 4–5 hours LOW or 2–3 hours HIGH, plus finishing · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds boneless chicken thighs
1 cup chicken broth
1/3 cup oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained and chopped
4 garlic cloves, minced
1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
3/4 cup heavy cream
1/2 cup grated Parmesan
1 tablespoon cornstarch mixed with 1 tablespoon cold water
1 1/2 cups uncooked rice, for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Add chicken, broth, sun-dried tomatoes, garlic, Italian seasoning, salt, and pepper to a 6-quart slow cooker.
2. Cover and cook on LOW 4–5 hours or HIGH 2–3 hours, until chicken reaches 165°F and is tender.
3. Cook rice according to package directions.
4. Stir cream, Parmesan, and cornstarch slurry into the hot sauce. Cover on HIGH 15–20 minutes, until thickened; stir gently and avoid a prolonged hard boil.
5. Serve chicken and sauce over rice.

Megan's Tip: Chop the sun-dried tomatoes small so their flavor spreads through the sauce.

FRIDAY OCTOBER 30 DINNER

Baked Pizza Pockets

Time: 30–35 minutes with prepared dough · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds prepared pizza dough
1 cup thick marinara, divided
2 1/2 cups shredded mozzarella
4 ounces pepperoni, chopped, optional
1 large egg, beaten
1 tablespoon grated Parmesan
1/2 teaspoon Italian seasoning

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oven to 425°F and line two baking sheets. Divide dough into 10 pieces and roll into 5–6-inch rounds.
2. Place about 1 tablespoon marinara, 1/4 cup cheese, and optional pepperoni on one half of each round, leaving a clear border.
3. Fold over, pinch edges firmly, and crimp with a fork. Cut a small vent in each top.
4. Brush with egg, sprinkle Parmesan and Italian seasoning, and bake 15–20 minutes, rotating pans halfway, until golden and dough is cooked through.
5. Rest 5 minutes. Heat remaining marinara and serve for dipping.

Megan's Tip: Thick sauce and a modest amount of filling help keep the pockets sealed.

Halloween Crockpot Chili and Cornbread

Time: 20 minutes prep; 6–7 hours LOW or 3–4 hours HIGH · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

Chili

2 pounds ground beef
1 large onion, diced
1 bell pepper, diced
4 garlic cloves, minced
2 cans (15 ounces each) kidney or pinto beans, drained and rinsed
1 can (28 ounces) crushed tomatoes
1 can (15 ounces) tomato sauce
1 cup beef broth
2 tablespoons chili powder
2 teaspoons cumin
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt, or to taste
1/2 teaspoon black pepper

Cornbread

1 cup cornmeal
1 cup all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon fine salt
2 tablespoons honey
1 large egg
1 cup buttermilk
1/4 cup melted butter
Cheddar and sour cream, optional toppings

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Brown beef, onion, and pepper in a skillet 8–10 minutes. Drain excess fat and stir in garlic for 30 seconds.
2. Transfer to a 6-quart slow cooker with the remaining chili ingredients. Cover and cook on LOW 6–7 hours or HIGH 3–4 hours. Taste for salt. Switch to WARM only after fully cooked.
3. For cornbread, heat oven to 400°F and grease a 9-inch square pan. Whisk cornmeal, flour, baking powder, and salt.
4. Separately whisk honey, egg, buttermilk, and melted butter. Stir wet into dry just until combined and spread in pan.
5. Bake 20–25 minutes, until golden and a toothpick comes out clean. Rest 10 minutes before cutting. Serve with chili and toppings.

Megan's Tip: The chili makes 6–8 servings, so there is room for extra hungry people or leftovers.

BONUS SECTION

Breakfast Recipes

4 new fall recipes for busy mornings

BREAKFAST RECIPE

Pumpkin Spice Overnight Oats

Time: 5 min / Overnight · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup Old-fashioned oats
1/2 cup Milk of choice
3 tbsp Pumpkin puree
1/4 cup Greek yogurt
1 tbsp Maple syrup
1/2 tsp Pumpkin pie spice
small handful Pecans or granola, for topping

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine oats, milk, pumpkin puree, yogurt, maple syrup and pumpkin pie spice in a jar or container with a lid.
2. Stir well until fully combined.
3. Cover and refrigerate overnight, at least 6 hours.
4. In the morning, stir and top with pecans or granola. Eat cold straight from the fridge, or warm 30 seconds if preferred.

Megan's Tip: Make a big batch on Sunday in individual mason jars, one per morning. By Thursday you haven't thought about breakfast once all week.

BREAKFAST RECIPE

Apple Cinnamon Overnight Oats

Time: 5 min / Overnight · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup Old-fashioned oats
1/2 cup Milk of choice
1/2 small Apple, grated (skin on)
1/4 cup Greek yogurt
1 tbsp Maple syrup or honey
1/2 tsp Cinnamon
small handful Walnuts or granola, for topping

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine oats, milk, grated apple, yogurt, maple syrup and cinnamon in a jar or container with a lid.
2. Stir well until fully combined.
3. Cover and refrigerate overnight, at least 6 hours.
4. In the morning, stir and top with walnuts or granola. Eat cold straight from the fridge, or warm 30 seconds if preferred.

Megan's Tip: Grate the apple instead of dicing it. Grated apple softens perfectly overnight and distributes through every bite instead of sinking to the bottom.

BREAKFAST RECIPE

Maple Pecan Overnight Oats

Time: 5 min / Overnight · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup Old-fashioned oats
1/2 cup Milk of choice
1/4 cup Greek yogurt
1.5 tbsp Maple syrup
1/4 tsp Cinnamon
2 tbsp, plus more for topping Chopped pecans

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine oats, milk, yogurt, maple syrup, cinnamon and pecans in a jar or container with a lid.
2. Stir well until fully combined.
3. Cover and refrigerate overnight, at least 6 hours.
4. In the morning, stir and top with a few more pecans and an extra drizzle of maple syrup if desired.

Megan's Tip: Toast the pecans in a dry skillet for 2-3 minutes before topping, even just once for the week's whole batch. It makes a genuinely noticeable difference in flavor for almost no extra effort.

BREAKFAST RECIPE

Apple Yogurt Parfait

Time: 5 min / 0 min · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

3/4 cup Greek yogurt
1/2 Apple, diced small
1/4 cup Granola
pinch Cinnamon
1 tbsp Honey

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Spoon a layer of yogurt into a glass or bowl.
2. Add a layer of diced apple, then a layer of granola.
3. Repeat the layers once more, finishing with a light dusting of cinnamon.
4. Drizzle honey over the top and serve immediately.

Megan's Tip: Layer the granola in right before eating, not ahead of time. Granola sitting in yogurt overnight goes soft, and the crunch against the soft apples is half the appeal.

BONUS SECTION

SOS Dinners

10 real-food dinners ready in 15 to 20 minutes

SOS DINNER

Canned Chicken Quesadillas

Time: 5 min / 10 min · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

2 cans (12.5 oz each) Chicken breast, canned, drained well
10 medium Flour tortillas (gluten-free if needed)
3 cups Shredded cheddar or Colby Jack cheese
1 tsp Chili powder
1/2 tsp Garlic powder
2 tbsp Butter or oil, for the skillet
to taste Salsa, sour cream, or avocado, for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Pat the drained chicken dry with a paper towel. Toss it with the chili powder and garlic powder.
2. Sprinkle cheese over half of each tortilla. Add chicken, then a little more cheese. Fold the tortillas in half.
3. Heat a skillet over medium heat and add a little butter or oil. Cook the quesadillas in batches for 2-3 minutes per side, until golden and the cheese melts.
4. Cut into wedges and serve with salsa, sour cream, or avocado.

Megan's Tip: If you have leftover peppers or onions, tuck them inside. Keep the filling fairly dry so the tortillas get crisp.

SOS DINNER

Jarred Marinara Skillet Pasta

Time: 5 min / 15 min · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

16 oz Pasta (gluten-free if needed)
2 tbsp Olive oil
1 Small onion, diced
3 Garlic cloves, minced
2 jars (24 oz each) Marinara sauce
1/2 cup Water
1 tsp Italian seasoning
2 cups Shredded mozzarella
1/2 cup Grated Parmesan, plus more for serving
to taste Salt and black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cook the pasta in salted water until just shy of done. Drain.
2. Meanwhile, heat the olive oil in a large, deep skillet over medium heat. Cook the onion for 4-5 minutes, then add the garlic and cook for 30 seconds.
3. Stir in the marinara, water, and Italian seasoning. Simmer for 5 minutes.
4. Add the pasta and toss until coated. Simmer for another 2-3 minutes, until the pasta is tender.
5. Sprinkle the mozzarella and Parmesan over the top. Cover for 2 minutes to melt the cheese, then season to taste.

Megan's Tip: A spoonful of butter stirred into jarred marinara at the end gives it a richer, homemade taste.

SOS DINNER

Doctored Canned Tomato Soup with Grilled Cheese

Time: 5 min / 15 min · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

3 cans (10.75 oz each) Condensed tomato soup
2 cans Milk (measured using an empty soup can)
1 can Water (measured using an empty soup can)
1 tbsp Butter
1/2 tsp Garlic powder
1/2 tsp Dried basil
1/4 cup Heavy cream or half-and-half
1/4 cup Grated Parmesan
to taste Black pepper
10 slices Bread (gluten-free if needed)
10 slices Cheddar, Colby Jack, or favorite melting cheese
3 tbsp Softened butter

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Whisk the condensed soup, milk, and water together in a large saucepan. Add the butter, garlic powder, and basil.
2. Warm over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until hot. Stir in the cream and Parmesan. Add black pepper to taste and keep warm over low heat.
3. Butter one side of each bread slice. Make 5 sandwiches with the buttered sides facing out and 2 slices of cheese inside each.
4. Cook in a skillet over medium-low heat for 3-4 minutes per side, until the bread is golden and the cheese has melted. Serve with the soup.

Megan's Tip: Keep the skillet at medium-low. The bread will turn golden while the cheese has time to melt all the way through.

SOS DINNER

Frozen Cheese Ravioli with Brown Butter

Time: 5 min / 15 min · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

2 packages, about 40 oz total Frozen cheese ravioli (gluten-free if needed)
8 tbsp Salted butter
2 Garlic cloves, minced
1/2 tsp Dried sage or Italian seasoning
1/2 cup Grated Parmesan, plus more for serving
1/4 cup Reserved pasta water
to taste Black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cook the ravioli in a large pot of salted water according to the package directions. Before draining, save 1/4 cup of the cooking water.
2. While the ravioli cooks, melt the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Continue cooking, swirling the pan often, until the butter smells nutty and the bits at the bottom turn golden brown, about 3-5 minutes.
3. Lower the heat. Stir in the garlic and sage or Italian seasoning; cook for 30 seconds.
4. Add the drained ravioli and a splash of reserved pasta water. Gently toss to coat, adding more water if needed.
5. Top with Parmesan and black pepper.

Megan's Tip: Have the garlic ready before you start browning the butter. Once the butter turns golden, it can burn quickly.

SOS DINNER

Canned Chicken and Black Bean Bowls

Time: 5 min / 15 min · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

2 cups Rice, uncooked
2 cans (12.5 oz each) Chicken breast, canned, drained
2 cans (15 oz each) Black beans, drained and rinsed
1 cup Salsa
1 tsp Ground cumin
1/2 tsp Garlic powder
2 cups Shredded cheddar or Colby Jack cheese
1 cup Frozen corn, thawed or warmed
1 Lime, cut into wedges
to taste Optional toppings: avocado, sour cream, lettuce, cilantro

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cook the rice according to the package directions.
2. In a large skillet over medium heat, combine the chicken, black beans, salsa, cumin, and garlic powder. Break up the chicken and warm everything through for 5-7 minutes.
3. Warm the corn, if using.
4. Divide the rice among 5 bowls. Add the chicken and beans, corn, and shredded cheese.
5. Set out lime wedges and any other toppings so everyone can finish their own bowl.

Megan's Tip: Add a splash of water to the skillet if the chicken mixture looks dry. You want enough saucy goodness to flavor the rice.

SOS DINNER

Instant Pot Loaded Baked Potato Bar

Time: 5 min / 30 min · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

5 large Russet potatoes (12-14 oz each), scrubbed
1 cup Water
2 cups Shredded cheddar cheese
1 cup Sour cream
6 slices Bacon, cooked and crumbled
4 tbsp Butter
3 Green onions, sliced
to taste Salt and black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Poke each potato several times with a fork. Pour the water into the Instant Pot and set the trivet inside. Stack the potatoes on the trivet.
2. Secure the lid and set the valve to Sealing. Pressure cook on High for 18 minutes for large potatoes. Let the pressure release naturally for 10 minutes, then carefully release the remaining pressure.
3. Check that a fork slides easily into the center. If the potatoes need more time, pressure cook for another 3-5 minutes.
4. Split the potatoes and fluff the insides with a fork. Set out the butter, cheese, sour cream, bacon, green onions, salt, and pepper for everyone to add their own toppings.

Megan's Tip: For crisp skins, transfer the cooked potatoes to a baking sheet, rub lightly with oil and salt, and broil for a few minutes while you set the table.

SOS DINNER

Breakfast for Dinner

Time: 5 min / 15 min · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

12 Large eggs
3 tbsp Milk
2 tbsp Butter
10 slices Bread (gluten-free if needed)
1-1.5 lbs Frozen breakfast sausage, bacon, or ham, thawed if required
to taste Salt and black pepper
to taste Fruit or jam, for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cook the sausage, bacon, or ham according to its package directions.
2. Whisk the eggs with the milk, a pinch of salt, and black pepper.
3. Melt the butter in a large nonstick skillet over medium-low heat. Add the eggs and cook, gently stirring, until softly set.
4. Toast the bread. Serve the eggs and protein with toast, fruit, and jam.

Megan's Tip: If you're short on eggs, stretch dinner with extra toast and a bowl of fruit. Nobody minds a breakfast plate that looks a little different from theirs.

SOS DINNER

Frozen Veggie and Canned Chicken Skillet with Jarred Sauce

Time: 5 min / 20 min · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

2 cups Rice, uncooked
2 tbsp Olive oil
2 bags (12-16 oz each) Frozen mixed vegetables or stir-fry vegetables
2 cans (12.5 oz each) Chicken breast, canned, drained
1 jar, about 15 oz Teriyaki or stir-fry sauce (check label if gluten-free)
2 tbsp Water, if needed
to taste Optional: sliced green onions or sesame seeds

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cook the rice according to the package directions.
2. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the frozen vegetables and cook for 7-10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until hot and any extra moisture has cooked off.
3. Add the chicken and gently break it into bite-size pieces.
4. Pour in the sauce and stir until everything is coated. Simmer for 3-5 minutes, adding a little water if the sauce is too thick.
5. Serve over rice with green onions or sesame seeds, if you like.

Megan's Tip: Let the vegetables cook off their extra water before adding the sauce. That keeps the skillet flavorful instead of watery.

SOS DINNER

Build-Your-Own Flatbread Pizza

Time: 5 min / 12 min · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

5 Large flatbreads or naan (gluten-free if needed)
1.5 cups Pizza sauce or marinara
4 cups Shredded mozzarella
2 tbsp Olive oil
1/2 tsp Italian seasoning
2-3 cups Toppings of choice: cooked sausage, pepperoni, peppers, onions, olives
to taste Grated Parmesan, for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the oven to 425F. Arrange the flatbreads on two baking sheets and brush the edges lightly with olive oil.
2. Spread each flatbread with about 1/4 to 1/3 cup sauce. Add mozzarella and your chosen toppings, then sprinkle with Italian seasoning.
3. Bake for 10-14 minutes, rotating the pans halfway through, until the cheese bubbles and the edges are golden.
4. Let cool for a minute, then slice and serve with Parmesan.

Megan's Tip: Put wet toppings, like fresh tomatoes, on sparingly so the center stays crisp.

SOS DINNER

Canned Chili over Instant Pot Baked Potatoes

Time: 5 min / 30 min · Serves 5 · Easy

INGREDIENTS

5 large Russet potatoes (12-14 oz each), scrubbed
1 cup Water
3 cans (15-19 oz each) Chili, with or without beans
2 cups Shredded cheddar cheese
1 cup Sour cream
3 Green onions, sliced
to taste Salt and black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Poke the potatoes several times with a fork. Pour the water into the Instant Pot, place the trivet inside, and stack the potatoes on top.
2. Secure the lid and set the valve to Sealing. Pressure cook on High for 18 minutes. Let the pressure release naturally for 10 minutes, then carefully release the rest.
3. While the potatoes finish, warm the chili in a saucepan over medium heat, stirring occasionally. If a fork doesn't slide easily into the potatoes, pressure cook them for another 3-5 minutes.
4. Split and fluff each potato. Spoon hot chili over the top, then add cheese, sour cream, green onions, salt, and pepper.

Megan's Tip: Keep a couple of cans of chili in the pantry specifically for this meal. It's one of those dinners you can make even when the fridge is looking empty.

BONUS SECTION

Fall Baking

12 recipes that make the house smell like fall

Apple Cider Donut Cake

All the cinnamon-sugar comfort of an orchard donut in a cake you can slice. Reducing the cider gives it apple flavor instead of just extra liquid.

INGREDIENTS

For the cake

2 cups apple cider, reduced to 3/4 cup and cooled
3 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon fine salt
2 teaspoons cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
3 large eggs
3/4 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup packed brown sugar
1 cup sour cream
1/2 cup neutral oil
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the coating

3 tablespoons melted butter
1/3 cup granulated sugar
1 tablespoon cinnamon

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Simmer the cider in a small saucepan until 3/4 cup remains, about 15–20 minutes. Cool it. Heat the oven to 350°F and thoroughly grease and flour the Bundt pan, reaching every ridge.
2. Whisk the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, and nutmeg. In another bowl, whisk the eggs, both sugars, sour cream, oil, vanilla, and cooled cider.
3. Fold the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients just until no dry flour remains. Pour into the pan and level the top.
4. Bake 45–55 minutes, until a skewer inserted in the thickest part comes out clean or with a few moist crumbs. Cool in the pan for 15 minutes, then invert onto a rack.
5. While the cake is still warm, brush with melted butter and sprinkle with the cinnamon sugar. Cool before slicing.

Megan's Tip: Measure the reduced cider after simmering. If it went below 3/4 cup, add a little fresh cider to reach that mark.

Pumpkin Cream Cheese Muffins

These are soft pumpkin muffins with a little cream cheese in the center. They feel like a bakery treat but make a useful batch for breakfast or an after-school snack.

INGREDIENTS

For the muffins

1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon fine salt
2 teaspoons cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1 cup pumpkin purée
3/4 cup packed brown sugar
2 large eggs
1/2 cup neutral oil or melted butter
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the filling

4 ounces cream cheese, softened
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the oven to 350°F and line a 12-cup muffin tin. Beat the cream cheese, granulated sugar, and 1/2 teaspoon vanilla until smooth.
2. Whisk the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and spices. In another bowl, whisk pumpkin, brown sugar, eggs, oil, and 1 teaspoon vanilla.
3. Fold the dry ingredients into the pumpkin mixture just until combined. Divide about half the batter among the muffin cups. Put roughly 1 teaspoon cream cheese filling in each center; cover with the remaining batter. Each cup should be no more than three-quarters full.
4. Bake 20–24 minutes, until the muffin portion springs back and a toothpick inserted into muffin rather than filling comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes in the pan, then transfer to a rack.

Megan's Tip: Keep the cream cheese centered so it does not stick to the liner. Refrigerate leftovers in a covered container for up to 4 days.

Maple Pecan Scones

Buttery edges, toasted pecans, and a little maple glaze make these excellent with coffee. They are the quieter fall bake next to the pumpkin and apple recipes.

INGREDIENTS

2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon fine salt
1/2 cup cold butter, cubed
3/4 cup chopped toasted pecans
1 large egg
1/2 cup cold heavy cream, plus a little for brushing
1/4 cup pure maple syrup
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the glaze

3/4 cup powdered sugar
1 1/2 tablespoons maple syrup
1–2 teaspoons milk, as needed

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the oven to 400°F and line a baking sheet. Whisk flour, baking powder, and salt. Cut in the cold butter until pea-size pieces remain, then stir in pecans.
2. Whisk the egg, cream, maple syrup, and vanilla. Stir into the flour mixture just until a shaggy dough forms. If dry flour remains, add cream 1 tablespoon at a time.
3. Pat into an 8-inch round about 1 inch thick. Cut into 8 wedges. Space them on the sheet, brush the tops lightly with cream, and chill 10 minutes while the oven finishes heating.
4. Bake 18–22 minutes, until golden and set. Cool at least 15 minutes. Whisk the glaze ingredients and drizzle over the scones.

Megan's Tip: Toast the pecans ahead and keep the butter cold. Both make a noticeable difference in the finished scones.

Maple Cinnamon Granola Clusters, Three Ways

One base batch becomes breakfast, yogurt topping, or a handful grabbed on the way out the door. Let the pan cool completely before breaking it up for the big clusters.

INGREDIENTS

4 cups Old-fashioned rolled oats
1 cup Chopped pecans or walnuts
1/2 cup Pumpkin seeds
1.5 teaspoons Cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon Fine salt
1/2 cup Pure maple syrup
1/3 cup Melted coconut oil or neutral oil
1 teaspoon Vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the oven to 300F and line a large rimmed sheet pan with parchment. Mix oats, nuts, seeds, cinnamon, and salt.
2. Whisk maple syrup, oil, and vanilla. Pour over the oats and mix until evenly coated. Spread into an even layer and press it down firmly with a spatula.
3. Bake 35-40 minutes, rotating the pan once. The edges should be golden and the center lightly toasted. Do not stir if you want clusters.
4. Cool completely on the pan, about 45 minutes, then break into pieces. Store airtight at room temperature for up to 2 weeks.

Megan's Tip: This is an easy recipe to double, but bake each batch on its own sheet so it can toast instead of steam. Use certified gluten-free oats when needed.

Pumpkin Coffee Cake with Cinnamon Streusel

The cinnamon crumb is the reason to cut another piece. This is a simple square-pan cake for a slow morning or an afternoon when everyone ends up in the kitchen.

INGREDIENTS

For the cake

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon fine salt
1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1 cup pumpkin purée
3/4 cup granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1/2 cup melted butter, cooled
1/2 cup milk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the streusel

3/4 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 cup packed brown sugar
1 tablespoon cinnamon
5 tablespoons cold butter, cubed

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the oven to 350°F. Grease and line a 9-inch square pan with parchment overhang.
2. Make the streusel: combine flour, brown sugar, and cinnamon. Work in cold butter until clumps form. Refrigerate while making the cake.
3. Whisk cake flour, baking powder, salt, and spices. In another bowl, whisk pumpkin, sugar, eggs, melted butter, milk, and vanilla. Fold wet and dry mixtures together just until combined.
4. Spread in the pan and scatter the streusel evenly over the top. Bake 40–50 minutes, until the center is set and a toothpick inserted into the cake comes out clean or with a few moist crumbs. Cool at least 20 minutes before cutting.

Megan's Tip: Keep the streusel in clumps rather than mixing it into fine sand. That is how you get the crumbly top in every slice.

Soft Molasses Spice Cookies

Soft centers, crackly sugar tops, and the smell of ginger and cloves. These taste like late October beginning to lean toward the holidays.

INGREDIENTS

2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
2 teaspoons ground ginger
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
1/2 teaspoon fine salt
3/4 cup butter, softened
3/4 cup packed brown sugar
1 large egg
1/3 cup unsulphured molasses
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/3 cup granulated sugar, for rolling

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Whisk flour, baking soda, spices, and salt. Beat butter and brown sugar until creamy. Beat in the egg, molasses, and vanilla.
2. Mix the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients just until combined. Cover and chill 30 minutes. Heat the oven to 350°F and line baking sheets.
3. Scoop tablespoon-size portions and roll in granulated sugar. Space about 2 inches apart. Bake 9–11 minutes, until edges are set and centers still look slightly soft.
4. Cool on the pan for 5 minutes, then move to a rack. They finish setting as they cool.

Megan's Tip: Do not wait for the centers to look firm in the oven; that is how a soft molasses cookie becomes crisp.

Brown Butter Cinnamon Blondies

One bowl after browning the butter, one pan, and chewy cinnamon-sugar edges. These are the easy bake to make when dessert was not on the schedule until someone asked for it.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup butter
1 1/2 cups packed brown sugar
2 large eggs
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon fine salt
2 tablespoons granulated sugar mixed with 1 teaspoon cinnamon, for topping

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the oven to 350°F. Line a 9 × 13-inch pan with parchment. Melt the butter in a light-colored saucepan over medium heat, swirling until the milk solids turn golden brown and smell nutty, about 5–7 minutes. Pour into a bowl, including the brown bits, and cool 10 minutes.
2. Whisk in the brown sugar, eggs, and vanilla. Fold in flour, cinnamon, baking powder, and salt just until combined.
3. Spread in the pan. Sprinkle the cinnamon sugar evenly over the top. Bake 24–29 minutes, until the edges are set and golden and a toothpick in the center has moist crumbs rather than wet batter.
4. Cool completely in the pan before cutting for clean squares.

Megan's Tip: Brown butter goes from nutty to burned quickly, so take the pan off the heat as soon as you see amber flecks. Cool the bars completely before slicing.

Salted Caramel Apple Hand Pies

Little apple pies you can hold, with a soft caramel drizzle and a pinch of salt. This is the weekend baking project of the section; make the pastry ahead to spread out the work.

INGREDIENTS

For the pastry

2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon fine salt
1 cup very cold butter, cubed
6–8 tablespoons ice water

For the apples

2 medium apples, peeled and finely diced
1/4 cup packed brown sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 tablespoon cornstarch

For finishing

1 egg beaten with 1 tablespoon water
1 tablespoon coarse sugar, optional
1/2 cup granulated sugar, for caramel
2 tablespoons butter, for caramel
1/4 cup heavy cream, for caramel
Flaky salt

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Mix flour and salt. Cut in the cold butter until pea-size pieces remain. Add ice water 1 tablespoon at a time, mixing just until the dough holds when squeezed. Divide into two discs, wrap, and chill at least 30 minutes.
2. Cook diced apples, brown sugar, cinnamon, and lemon juice in a skillet over medium heat for 5–7 minutes, until slightly softened. Stir in cornstarch and cook 1 minute. Cool completely so hot filling does not melt the pastry.
3. Heat the oven to 400°F and line a baking sheet. Roll each disc about 1/8 inch thick. Cut 16 circles about 4 1/2 inches wide, rerolling scraps once. Place a scant 2 tablespoons apple filling on 8 circles, leaving clear edges.
4. Brush edges with egg wash, cover with remaining circles, press closed, and crimp with a fork. Cut a small vent in each top. Brush with egg wash and sprinkle with coarse sugar if using. Chill the assembled pies for 10 minutes.
5. Bake 22–27 minutes, until deeply golden. Cool 10 minutes. Meanwhile, make the caramel: melt the 1/2 cup sugar in a small, dry, light-colored saucepan over medium heat, stirring only as needed to melt any dry patches. When it turns amber, remove from heat. Carefully whisk in 2 tablespoons butter and then the heavy cream; it will bubble vigorously. Return to low heat briefly if lumps remain, then cool until thick enough to drizzle.
6. Drizzle about 1/3 cup of the caramel over the hand pies and add a tiny pinch of flaky salt just before serving. Refrigerate leftover caramel for coffee or another dessert.

Megan's Tip: Drizzle caramel after baking; putting it inside the pastry makes leaks more likely. This homemade caramel has no corn syrup.

Carrot Cake Cupcakes with Maple Cream Cheese Frosting

All the spice and soft crumb of carrot cake in a size that is easy to share. Freshly grated carrots make these tender; the maple frosting keeps the sweetness warm and simple.

INGREDIENTS

For the cupcakes

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon fine salt
2 teaspoons cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
3 large eggs
3/4 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup packed brown sugar
3/4 cup neutral oil
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 1/2 cups finely grated carrots, lightly packed

For the frosting

8 ounces cream cheese, softened
1/2 cup butter, softened
2 cups powdered sugar
1 tablespoon pure maple syrup
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the oven to 350°F. Line 18 muffin cups. Whisk flour, leaveners, salt, and spices.
2. In a second bowl, whisk eggs, both sugars, oil, and vanilla. Stir in carrots, then fold in the dry ingredients just until no flour remains.
3. Divide among liners, filling each about two-thirds full. Bake 20–24 minutes, until the tops spring back and a toothpick comes out clean. Cool completely.
4. Beat cream cheese and butter until smooth. Add powdered sugar, maple syrup, and vanilla; beat until fluffy. Spread or pipe onto cooled cupcakes. Refrigerate frosted leftovers in a covered container for up to 4 days.

Megan's Tip: Grate carrots on the fine or medium holes; thick packaged carrot shreds do not soften as nicely in a cupcake.

No-Bake Apple Butter Cheesecake Cups

The make-ahead dessert for a day when the oven is busy. Spiced apple butter swirls through a light cheesecake filling over a buttery crumb base.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cups crushed plain cookies or graham crackers
3 tablespoons melted butter
8 ounces cream cheese, softened
1/3 cup powdered sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup cold heavy cream
1/2 cup apple butter, plus 1/4 cup for topping
Cinnamon, for finishing

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Mix cookie crumbs with melted butter. Divide among 8 small cups and press lightly; do not compact hard.
2. Beat the cream cheese, powdered sugar, and vanilla until smooth. In a separate bowl, whip the cold cream to medium-stiff peaks. Fold whipped cream into the cream cheese mixture, then gently fold in 1/2 cup apple butter so the filling stays lightly streaked.
3. Spoon over the crumb bases. Chill at least 2 hours until set. Add a little of the remaining apple butter and a dusting of cinnamon before serving. Keep refrigerated and eat within 3 days.

Megan's Tip: Use thick apple butter, not thin applesauce; it gives the cups concentrated apple flavor without loosening the filling. Gluten-free cookies make an easy gluten-free crumb base.

Soft Honey Butter Dinner Rolls

These are for chili night, soup night, and the dinner when someone wants bread to catch the last bit of sauce. They can be shaped ahead and baked when you need them.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup warm whole milk, 105–110°F
2 1/4 teaspoons instant yeast
1/4 cup honey
1 large egg
1/4 cup melted butter, cooled slightly
1 teaspoon fine salt
3 3/4 to 4 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons melted butter mixed with 1 teaspoon honey, for brushing

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Mix warm milk, yeast, honey, egg, melted butter, salt, and 3 3/4 cups flour. Knead by mixer or hand for 7–9 minutes, adding more flour a tablespoon at a time only until the dough is soft and tacky but manageable.
2. Put in a lightly oiled bowl, cover, and rise 60–90 minutes, until doubled. Grease a 9 × 13-inch pan.
3. Divide the dough into 12 pieces and shape smooth balls. Arrange in the pan, cover, and rise 30–45 minutes until puffy.
4. Heat the oven to 375°F. Bake 18–23 minutes, until golden and the center rolls are baked through (about 190°F in the center). Brush warm rolls with honey butter.

Megan's Tip: Freeze fully cooled rolls in an airtight bag for up to 2 months and warm them covered in a low oven.

Garlic Rosemary Focaccia

An olive oil bread with crisp edges and a soft middle, made for dipping in soup or slicing beside a slow cooker dinner. The garlic goes on after baking so it stays fragrant instead of burning.

INGREDIENTS

4 cups all-purpose or bread flour
2 teaspoons instant yeast
2 teaspoons fine salt
1 3/4 cups warm water
5 tablespoons olive oil, divided, plus 1 teaspoon to oil the bowl
1 tablespoon chopped fresh rosemary
2 garlic cloves, finely grated
1/4 teaspoon flaky salt, for the top

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Mix flour, yeast, fine salt, warm water, and 2 tablespoons olive oil into a sticky dough. Stir vigorously for 2 minutes; no lengthy kneading is needed. Cover in a lightly oiled bowl and rise 60–90 minutes, until puffy and roughly doubled.
2. Coat a 9 × 13-inch metal pan with 1 tablespoon olive oil. Scrape dough into the pan and gently stretch toward the edges. Rest 15 minutes if it springs back, then stretch again. Cover and rise 30–45 minutes until airy.
3. Heat the oven to 425°F. Drizzle with the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil, dimple deeply with oiled fingertips, and scatter rosemary and flaky salt over the top.
4. Bake 22–28 minutes, until deep golden brown, especially along the edges. Mix the grated garlic with the final 1 tablespoon olive oil and brush over the hot bread. Cool 10 minutes before slicing.

Megan's Tip: Give the dough its rest when it resists stretching; pulling harder tears out the air.