

# MY KITCHEN CHALK BOARD

SEASONAL  
MENUS FOR  
**MODERN  
NEW ENGLAND  
FAMILIES**



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# WELCOME!

IF YOU’RE READING THIS, you must be interested in finding ways to keep cooking a regular part of your filled-to-the-brim life. I know I am.

I’ve been interested in food and cooking since I was a teenager, and I’ve worked with food my entire career. Over the years, home cooking has always anchored me. Whether I’m planning an elaborate dinner party, learning to break down a whole fish, or putting Tuesday’s dinner on the table, I’m happiest when I’m learning about food and cooking and putting those lessons into practice. But as any working parent knows, this is easier said than done.

Before children, cooking was a choice. If I wanted to cook a three-course meal and eat it at nine o’clock on a weeknight, I did. If I wanted to skip dinner in favor of popcorn, wine, and Netflix, I did that, too. When my husband and I moved in together, we threw dinner parties, made jams and pickles, and baked cakes and pies all the time. Cooking was as much a hobby as a way to feed our family of two. Then our family doubled in size, and daily life became a much bigger balancing act that included the need to feed two small boys. Multiple times, every single day!

This need is not always a source of joy, as millions of parents will tell you (especially those who find themselves shelving their list of must-try recipes in order to make their thousandth pot of buttered noodles). But early in the current era of cooking for my young children, I decided I needed to keep the weekly chaos at bay while keeping the cooking spark lit—so I started planning our weekly meals. Since then, I’ve written our week’s menu in plain sight on our kitchen chalkboard. This simple act has two wonderful outcomes: I’m able to manage expectations (for those who can read) and it keeps me honest.

Menu planning might sound like dowdy mom-sense, but let’s get past that. Planning has made me a better cook. Carving out the time to think through the week and figure out our meals has given me the space to find new sources of inspiration, to try new dishes and techniques, and to flex my improvisational cooking muscles. When you know what you’re cooking on any given night, and the ingredients are ready, waiting, and possibly prepared—you’re stepping into the kitchen with an advantage. The clock might be ticking, the hangries might be setting in, but you’re armed with a plan.

HOW I PLAN

**EVERY FAMILY IS DIFFERENT,** and every person reading this cookbook will develop their own logic about menu planning. For me there are four basic tenets guiding the choices I make: economy, sustainability, creativity, and sanity.

I look for economy—how can I save time and money? I’m committed to sustainability and try to make thoughtful purchases that will support local growers and (in my own way) have a positive impact on the planet. Cooking is one of the ways I exercise my creativity. It’s one of the most basic reasons I am a cook, so I want to make space for that in my life. Lastly, I do it for my sanity: life is complex—dinner doesn’t have to be.

**Make the Time:** Like most habits, weekly home cooking requires some commitment. Every week, I try to block out time to make next week’s menu plan. It might be ten minutes on the back of an envelope, or it could be an hour and a stack of new cookbooks.

**Check the Calendar:** What nights are we all together? What nights is one parent out? What about after-school activities or date nights? If only one parent is home, we keep it simple—soup or turnovers from the freezer; burritos or grilled cheese sandwiches. We try to sit down together for dinner at least twice a week—so those meals might have a little more effort behind them.

**Check the Budget:** We set a monthly budget and try our best to stick to it. It’s doable if we focus mostly on plant-based meals and minimally processed or prepared foods; and when we buy meat or fish, we stretch that protein over a couple of meals.

**Check the Pantry:** We don’t have a ton of storage space in our kitchen, so I try to keep dry goods moving through. If I see some black beans or polenta hanging around on the shelf for a while, they might end up as the starting points for a weekly plan.

**Consider the Season:** What’s good right now? In the fall, we’re eating lots of leafy greens and roasted squash. Apples, too. In the thick of winter we devour all those roots and brighten things up with a lot of citrus. Spring is all asparagus, greens, peas, and radishes. Summer—tomatoes and corn for life. I love seasonal eating: the anticipation, the abundance of certain foods yielding to the next season’s standouts. I’m no purist, but seasonal flavors definitely influence our choices while helping us tune in to agriculture and its rhythms.

**Brainstorm the Dishes:** I’ve heard from a lot of people that this is the hardest part, because falling into a dinnertime rut is so easy (I do it all the time). Not to mention that predicting what your family will actually eat is similar to predicting the future. I can’t say I’ve solved the riddle, or that my children eat everything I make—they certainly do not. But I try to strike a balance of satisfying my own needs as a cook and eater with flavors and dishes that won’t totally gross out the boys. At least one or two nights of the week are fully child-friendly: we have a “white dinner” almost every week (that’s buttered noodles and roasted cauliflower), as well as something everyone can customize, like tacos or rice bowls. The other nights are about exposure and variety—at least, in theory. I also plan to make at least one dish or ingredient (like

a whole chicken or a batch of grains) that can be used in a few different ways over the course of the week.

**Shop and Prep:** Once the plan’s in place, I make a list and head to the store and farmers market. We try to do that on Saturdays, so there’s a breather between gathering groceries and prepping the goods. Then I think through what can be done in advance to save time and effort on weeknights and give myself a couple of hours to get it done. From there, weeknight cooking falls into place, usually in under forty minutes on a given night.

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**HOW TO USE THIS BOOK**

**THIS BOOK INCLUDES** sixteen seasonal weekly menus with guidance about how to streamline your efforts, including which dishes are easy to double and freeze—making life easier down the road.

Every menu is designed with a couple of dishes or building blocks that can be made ahead of time. **(THESE COMPONENTS, WHEN USED AS INGREDIENTS IN OTHER RECIPES, ARE INDICATED LIKE THIS.)** Sometimes these include batch recipes; sometimes they are a variety of smaller dishes that can be pulled together quickly to create something your family will (hopefully) devour. A pot of chili might get served with quesadillas one night and ladled over baked sweet potatoes later in the week. A traditional pot roast is transformed into a pasta dish. A roasted chicken begets tortilla soup.

You can follow the menus faithfully, or you can pick a few of dishes in a given week and plug them into your own plan. Typically, the first two or three meals will give you the most bang for your buck in terms of efficiency, so if there are weeks where you

won’t be cooking dinner every night, this is a great place to start.

My hope is you will absorb a little of my zeal for menu planning and find, along the way, plenty of good ideas to answer the proverbial question: “What’s for dinner?”

**THE UPSIDE OF MENU PLANNING**

**Reduce Spending and Waste:** When you plan out what you’re cooking, you only buy and use what you need. Some experts estimate that 40 percent of food in America is wasted—along with the land and water resources used to produce that food. Food waste is a big issue with a big environmental impact, but one that families can address when they plan ahead. And since you reduce spending when you reduce waste, there’s really no downside here.

**Build Skills:** Like any craft, the more you practice cooking, the better you get. When you cook a lot, you learn how to streamline the process, how to step away from rigidly following recipes, and how to get creative with ingredients to make things your very own. When you’re purposeful about it, you can learn so much about building flavors and strengthening techniques. It’s incredibly satisfying.

**Take Time to Make Time:** For me, spending a couple of hours in a stress-free kitchen on a Sunday is blissfully worth it. When I have a refrigerator full of prepped ingredients I know that our mid-week lingering at the park or library won’t result in dinnertime chaos.



MAKE IT WORK

**EVER SINCE I STARTED POSTING** my weekly chalkboard plans to social media, people have asked me how I stay the course amidst the other priorities in our family’s life. First, cooking is part of who I am—I just do it. After that, it’s not magic, but here are a few strategies I’ve developed along the way.

**Embrace the Freezer:** The freezer is one of the top five most important tools in my kitchen (see also: sharp knives, cast iron skillets, dutch oven, sheet pans). It’s like an extension of the fridge. I keep stuff in quick rotation—so if I make a double batch of pulled pork and freeze half, I’ll add the second batch to the menu within a couple of weeks. The longer dishes stay in there, the more the freezer starts to feel like a very cold graveyard of ice-crystally items you’re no longer in the mood to eat. I like to avoid that; freezing food is a huge part of the way I cook now.

I freeze almost everything in one form or another—cooked meats and grains; stock, soup, stew, and beans in their liquid; fritters, turnovers, and casseroles; cookies, cookie dough, pastry dough; some blanched and roasted vegetables; fruit; fish and fish cakes; and vegetable trimmings for making flavorful stock.

There’s no shame in playing freezer roulette on a regular basis—it’s saved my butt on many occasions.

**Pick Your Battles:** I have one very picky eater in my family, but dinnertime drama discourages me, so we try not to make a

big deal out of his choices. I make what I make, and often include a component to accommodate him (usually a pot of noodles). We ask Ellis to take a taste of what is being served. (He typically protests and makes a fuss.) If there’s nothing at the table he’ll eat, he can have toast or a banana, or make up for it in the morning. Minimizing conflict at the table helps keep morale up for doing it all over again the next day.

**Try Something New:** If Ellis is picky, Quincy is (sort of) adventurous. He devours bluefish, avocados, squid, and when I watch him dig into a bowl of mussels, I’m one proud mama. Point being, if we hadn’t encouraged him to try different foods, we wouldn’t know how much he loves mussels (or sardines, for that matter). I expose my kids to new things over and over, and even though I’m not always successful, every dinner fail is worth it to find these hidden winners.

**Key Word:** Flexible. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve made a weekly plan only to veer off course, or when I’ve gotten so disorganized I haven’t thought through meals at all. When plans run amok or don’t exist, I rely on improvisation and whatever the fridge and pantry hold to carry me through. The only rule I follow is to not let food go to waste. Fried rice, frittata, pizza, loaded toast, baked potatoes, and grain bowls are all good ways to use up what’s in the fridge when you’re at loose ends for dinner.



ABOUT THE INGREDIENTS

**PEOPLE MAKE ALL KINDS OF CALCULATIONS** when deciding what to feed their families. Often it has to do with how much food costs and how long it takes to prepare, but sometimes, too, with how the food was grown or raised, how far it traveled, and so forth. It’s a tricky topic—everyone’s priorities (and food budgets) are different, so rather than tell you what to buy, I’ll just share what makes sense for my family.

**Picky about Proteins:** These days, animal proteins are more like really great supporting cast members, rather than starring roles, on our dinner plates. We eat meat, but we are pretty picky about it. We aim for it to be antibiotic free and raised in a humane way. I buy most of our meat from a Vermont-based CSA-style service, so I can learn a little about the producers and how they operate their farms. This means we spend more on meat, so often we go for cheaper cuts and make them count by preparing them carefully, shrinking the portion sizes, and stretching the meat across a couple of meals.

When it comes to fish, I try to stick to wild-caught domestic species, in season. (And if it’s caught in New England waters, even better.) Fresh fish is something we eat occasionally—once a month, maybe (except in summer when it’s more like two or three times a month, at least). Though I love to splurge on wild-caught salmon, bringing home lesser-appreciated species such as bluefish, mackerel, and redfish, along with farmed shellfish, is a great way to experiment and keep costs down.

**What’s in Season?** I talk about my loyalty to seasonal produce throughout the book—it’s where my buying decisions begin. I try to consistently support small-scale farms and farmers by setting aside a portion of our budget every week, year-round, to buy food produced in New England. In the winter, that portion is smaller; in summer, it swells. I pay attention to prices when local foods come into season—there are often really good deals to be had when apples or asparagus are super-abundant, for example.

**Stocking the Pantry:** A well-stocked pantry makes cooking easier, especially on the nights when you’re putting dinner together on the fly. In my kitchen, there’s not a ton of storage space, so I don’t keep things in multiples or in great volume. But here’s what I try to always have on hand:

- **Oils:** I cook almost everything in olive oil, unless I’m deep-frying (which is rare) or cooking on really high heat—in which case, I also keep a neutral oil with a high smoke point, like canola or safflower. I like having sesame oil around to finish some dishes, and occasionally I’ll splurge on a fancy walnut or almond oil. I squirrel away my bacon fat in a little Mason jar, which comes in handy for high-heat searing.
- **Aromatics and herbs:** For starting or enhancing most things we cook: yellow and red onions, garlic, ginger, carrots, shallots, parsley, and often cilantro.
- **Nuts and nut butters:** I keep nuts and nut butters around for snacking, baking, and sprinkling onto salads and vegetable

dishes; puréeing into sauces, smoothies, and so forth. The usual suspects include peanut butter, tahini, walnuts, almonds, and sesame and pumpkin seeds (the latter is excellent in pesto).

- **Grains and starches:** A minimum of two or three types of pasta (for our noodle monster), coarse cornmeal, basmati and brown rice, oats, barley, all-purpose flour, a potato of some kind, and a loaf of crusty, grainy bread.
- **Beans:** My favorite category of food! I always have chickpeas (canned and dried), black beans, and French lentils (which cook quickly, so are nice in a pinch). Often I have pintos, cannellini, and red lentils, too.
- **Sweeteners:** Honey, maple syrup, granulated sugar, molasses (which I use on its own and to mix into white sugar to create brown sugar).
- **Dairy:** Whole milk plain yogurt, unsalted butter, Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, cheddar cheese (mostly for snacking, but also for stovetop mac-and-cheese, quesadillas, grilled cheese, and the like), and usually ricotta.
- **Sources of acidity:** These are vital. Acids are essential to balancing everything from salad dressings to stews. I keep about three or four vinegars, including red wine, apple cider, rice wine, and balsamic (plus an occasional splurge on something fancy). Lemons? Always! Lemons, salt, and olive oil are like a holy trinity of simple home cooking.

- **Liquids:** Whole peeled tomatoes in their juice, coconut milk, and (homemade) chicken stock.
- **Additional sources of flavor:** Anchovies, soy sauce, hot sauce, dijon mustard, a few different types of salt. (As I write this I have Kosher, flaky sea salt from England, and hickory-smoked salt.) I also have a modest but impactful collection of spices on hand.
- **Eggs:** They’re so important they have their own category! I have those, too.

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This is a sturdy pantry that can be a jumping-off point for your weekly plans, while also delivering some pretty good meals if you’re in a pinch or feel like improvising instead of planning. Cycle seasonal produce and quality meats through your kitchen, along with the occasional specialty item, and you’re good to go!

Ok—enough guidelines. Let’s cook dinner.









## Late June

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**HONEY-MUSTARD CHICKEN •  
GRILLED PEPPERS AND ZUCCHINI**

**NACHOS WITH BITS AND BOBS**

**PASTA SALAD WITH ZUCCHINI AND HERBS •  
ROASTED SHRIMP AND TOMATO SKEWERS**

**PANZANELLA**

**SUMMER ROLLS**

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**IN THE WARM WEATHER**, I would grill outside every night if I could. But sometimes our beloved charcoal grill is just too much trouble on a busy night. So when I do grill, I throw all sorts of food on the grates (pizza, lemons, fruit) and make sure to cook extra for dinners and lunches throughout the week. It's a win-win: cooking out is (mostly) super fun, and having extra prepped ingredients on hand—well, that's the name of the game.



**THE JOY OF SUMMER FARE**, for me anyway, is simplifying the cooking. I tend toward flexible dishes that can absorb the bits and pieces of whatever’s popping in the garden or at the farmers’ market. In these warm, languid months, when routines have either slowed way down or gone out the window altogether, I plan my week with recipes like the ones included here. I keep things light and rely on seasonal ingredients that do double duty over the course of the week.

Grilled chicken is a workhorse in the summer. One night you can serve it up with a tangy honey mustard and grilled vegetables hot off of the grill; the next night that same batch of chicken can be thrown into a nacho feast. Summer rolls are also a household favorite here; they’re another hands-on meal that requires next to no actual cooking (hello, summer goals).

The rule I live by in the summer is to know my limits, and a hot kitchen is one of them. I tend to swap my long-simmered dried beans for the canned variety for this reason. And so I don’t have a pasta pot and a hot oven going at the same time on some steamy evening, I find a morning to cook pasta for the pasta salad. I’ll scoop out the pasta, leave the water in the pot, and blanch the rice noodles, followed by the shrimp (for summer rolls), too. This keeps the boiling to a minimum and extends the shrimp’s freshness.

Some do-ahead work this week includes seasoning the chicken at least thirty minutes or the night before you grill it. Thread the shrimp skewers up to two days in advance of when you plan on cooking and eating them. Nothing major, but it’s good to get steps out of the way when you can.

### THE BIG COOK

- SEASON AND GRILL THE CHICKEN
- PREP AND GRILL THE PEPPERS AND ZUCCHINI
- MAKE THE SMOKY REFRIED PINTOS

### OTHER WAYS TO GET AHEAD

- COOK THE PASTA FOR THE PASTA SALAD
- BLANCH THE SHRIMP AND COOK THE RICE NOODLES FOR THE SUMMER ROLLS
- PICKLE THE RED ONIONS (PG. 270)
- MAKE THE VINAIGRETTE FOR THE PASTA SALAD





# Honey-Mustard Chicken • Grilled Peppers and Zucchini

1 HOUR • serves 4

**HERE’S A STRAIGHTFORWARD AND DELICIOUS SUMMER MEAL.** A couple of tips: Pat the chicken dry before grilling; otherwise it could steam a little, which prevents the skin from getting crisp. Glaze toward the end of cooking—too early and the glaze will burn. You need oil on the vegetables to help carry the smoky flavors of the grill, but use it sparingly—too much and it will cause flare-ups and scorch the peppers and zucchini. After the vegetables come off the grill, I usually drizzle on a little extra oil along with lemon juice or vinegar and chopped herbs.

The chicken and vegetables you grill today can be used for a number of meals throughout the week. I’ll often remove the skin and shred the chicken when I’m cleaning up from this meal—it’s easier to do at that point, as opposed to after it’s been refrigerated.

## HONEY-MUSTARD CHICKEN

- 3 to 4 pounds bone-in, skin-on chicken legs and thighs, trimmed of extra fat
- 2 teaspoons salt, plus more to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 sprigs rosemary
- ½ cup honey
- ½ cup dijon mustard

## GRILLED PEPPERS AND ZUCCHINI

- 4 to 5 red bell peppers
- 2 to 3 medium green zucchini
- 1 to 2 teaspoons olive oil, plus more to taste
- Salt, to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- ½ lemon
- Leaves from 1 to 2 sprigs marjoram or oregano

- 1 Season the chicken.** The night before cooking, place the chicken in a large plastic bag and add about 2 teaspoons of salt, a few grinds of pepper, and the rosemary sprigs. Refrigerate overnight.
- 2 Light the grill.** Remove the chicken from the refrigerator and pat dry. Discard the rosemary. Light the grill. If you’re working on a gas grill, turn the heat on one side to medium-high and on the other side to low. If you have a charcoal grill, start the charcoal in a chimney. When it’s ready, dump into a pile on one side of the grill and spread it out so the heat will be evenly distributed on that side. Let the coals burn down (or the gas grill heat up) and clean the grate if necessary.
- 3 Make the glaze.** While the coals are burning down, whisk together the honey and mustard in a small bowl, add salt and pepper to taste, and set aside.
- 4 Prep the vegetables.** Stand the peppers vertically on the cutting board and cut lengthwise into 3 pieces, removing stems and seeds. Cut the tops and bottoms off of the zucchini and cut lengthwise into long strips about

½-inch thick. Place the vegetables in a large bowl, drizzle with 1 to 2 teaspoons of oil, sprinkle with salt, and set aside.

- 5 Grill the chicken.** When the grill is ready, place the chicken, skin-side down, on the hotter grate (depending on the size of the grill, you may need to do this in batches). Sear, uncovered, for 3 to 4 minutes on each side. Move the chicken to the cooler side of the grill. Cover, making sure to leave the air intake (the little holes in the top of the cover) open. After about 5 minutes, turn the chicken pieces. If some don’t have enough char, return them to the hot side for a few minutes.
- 6 Glaze the chicken.** Brush the chicken pieces with the honey-mustard glaze and cover the grill. After 2 to 3 minutes, turn the chicken and brush the other side with glaze. Cover again for another 2 to 3 minutes. Uncover the grill, turn the chicken, and brush with more glaze if you like.
- 7 Take the chicken’s temperature.** When it reaches 160°F, remove the chicken from the grill and onto a platter and cover with foil. Portion out 1 to 2 pieces of chicken per person for the meal and reserve the rest for meals later this week.
- 8 Grill the vegetables and lemon.** When you take the chicken off the grill, place the sliced vegetables, along with the ½ lemon (cut-side down), on the hotter side. Cook for 3 to 4 minutes on each side. Move to the cooler side of the grill and continue cooking for another 1 to 2 minutes if needed. Remove from grill, let cool, and store half of the peppers and zucchini in the refrigerator.
- 9 Finish and serve.** Place remaining peppers and zucchini on a platter and drizzle with a little oil. Squeeze the grilled lemon over the top, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and scatter with the marjoram or oregano leaves. Serve everything family style.



# Top Notch Nachos

**NACHOS ARE A PERFECTLY VIABLE DINNER OPTION.** They’re a crowd pleaser, a great vehicle for using up bits and bobs, and they don’t require utensils (more summer goals). If I were to make nachos just for me (ha!), I’d layer in as many ingredients as possible to increase the odds of finding that perfect loaded chip. But my kids like theirs pretty plain, with just chicken and cheese. My solution is nachos that are half-loaded for the adults, half plain for the kiddos. (Their loss.)

A few tips: First, use more cheese than you think you need. Next, build nachos in layers—chips + toppings + cheese, then repeat. Finally, leave salsa, guacamole, sour cream, and any other “wet” additions on the side. Putting them on top will make the chips soggy, and soggy nachos are sad nachos.



## SMOKY REFRIED PINTOS

MAKE AHEAD!

20 MINUTES • makes about 2 cups

**IN THE WINTER,** I use dried beans, but when the weather heats up, a quick can of beans does the trick.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 tablespoon olive oil, plus more for drizzling          | ½ teaspoon dried chile powder, like ancho    |
| ½ medium yellow onion, chopped                           | ½ teaspoon ground cumin                      |
| 2 garlic cloves, peeled and minced                       | ½ teaspoon cinnamon                          |
| 1 tablespoon tomato paste                                | ½ teaspoon salt, plus more to taste          |
| 1 tablespoon adobo sauce (from chipotle chiles in adobo) | 15-ounce can pinto beans, drained and rinsed |
|  | ½ cup canned whole tomatoes in their juice   |

Heat the oil in a medium skillet over medium heat. Add the onions and cook until softened, 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for another minute. Add the tomato paste, the adobo sauce, spices, and salt and cook, stirring, for 1 to 2 minutes. Add the pinto beans and stir to coat. Using your hands, tear and squeeze the tomatoes as you add them to the pan. Stir to combine. Bring to a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until mixture has thickened, 10 to 15 minutes. Remove from heat and mash the beans, drizzling in a little water or olive oil as needed to make them creamier. Taste and adjust seasoning, then store in refrigerator.

## Nachos with Bits and Bobs

15 MINUTES ACTIVE, 30 MINUTES TOTAL • serves 4 to 6

- 12 ounces sturdy corn chips

1 cup **SMOKY REFRIED PINTOS**

1 cup **GRILLED CHICKEN**, pulled

1 to 2 pieces **GRILLED RED BELL PEPPER**, chopped

½ cup **PICKLED JALAPEÑOS** (pg. 270)

1½ cups shredded monterey jack cheese

1 cup shredded cheddar cheese

½ cup crumbled cotija cheese

2 to 3 radishes, thinly sliced

2 scallions, green parts only, thinly sliced

¼ cup cilantro leaves

¼ cup salsa

1 avocado, mashed and mixed with salt and lime juice to taste

¼ cup plain yogurt or sour cream
- 1 Assemble the nachos.** Preheat the oven to 400°F. In a 9x13 inch pan or on a rimmed baking sheet lined with foil, add ⅓ of the chips, top them with ⅓ of the beans, chicken, and peppers, and add a mixture of the cheeses. Repeat 2 more times, finishing with a layer of cheese.

**2 Bake.** Place in the oven until the cheese is melted and bubbling, 10 to 15 minutes.

**3 Finish and serve.** Scatter the radishes, scallions, and cilantro leaves over the nachos and serve with bowls of salsa, mashed avocado, and yogurt or sour cream.



# Pasta Salad with Zucchini and Herbs • Roasted Shrimp and Tomato Skewers

40 MINUTES • serves 4

**THIS DISH IS A FAR CRY** from the macaroni-and-mayo concoction that might come to mind when you think of pasta salad. It relies on a zippy vinaigrette, lots of herbs, crunchy pistachios and briny feta to keep it lively. No mayo. I wouldn't do that to you.

As for the shrimp skewers, they're simple, delicious, and kid-friendly (around here, anyway). Keep in mind that shrimp vary in size; I like to buy wild-caught domestic shrimp that are on the larger side for this recipe; look for a count of fifteen to twenty shrimp per pound.

## PASTA SALAD WITH ZUCCHINI AND HERBS

1 pound fusilli

### LEMON-HONEY VINAIGRETTE

1 cup diced GRILLED ZUCCHINI

¼ cup chopped dill

2 tablespoons torn mint leaves

2 tablespoons torn basil leaves

½ cup sheep's milk feta cheese

¼ cup shelled roasted pistachios

## ROASTED SHRIMP AND TOMATO SKEWERS

8 metal skewers (if you don't have these, just throw everything on the sheet pan)

24 cherry tomatoes

16 shrimp, shelled and deveined

2 tablespoons olive oil

2 garlic cloves, peeled

3 thyme sprigs

Salt, to taste

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

**1 Cook the pasta.** Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and cook the pasta until just al dente. It should be slightly underdone so it can soak up the vinaigrette without getting soggy.

**2 Dress the pasta.** Drain the pasta and rinse with cool water to stop the cooking. When cool, transfer to a large bowl and toss with the vinaigrette.

**3 Assemble the skewers.** Set the oven to 425°F. Thread the skewers so that each has 3 tomatoes and 2 shrimp, alternating. Don't leave any space between the shrimp and tomatoes; squish them as close together as you can without bursting the tomatoes. Place in a shallow baking dish and drizzle with olive oil. Add the garlic, thyme, and a sprinkle of salt and pepper. Toss to coat and refrigerate for 30 minutes or up to 2 days ahead.

**4 Roast the skewers.** Place the skewers on a rimmed baking sheet, pat dry, and roast until the shrimp have just turned pink, about 10 minutes.

**5 Finish the pasta.** While the skewers roast, toss the zucchini, herbs, cheese, and pistachios into the dressed pasta. Stir to combine and season to taste.

**6 Serve.** Remove skewers from oven and serve 2 per person over a heap of the pasta salad.

## LEMON-HONEY VINAIGRETTE

MAKE AHEAD!

Juice of 2 lemons (about 6 tablespoons)

1 teaspoon honey

1 small garlic clove, peeled

Salt, to taste

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

½ cup olive oil

Add the lemon juice and honey to a small jar with a lid, secure the lid, and shake until combined. Smash the garlic with the side of a knife, sprinkle a few pinches of salt over it, and mince and smash until a coarse paste forms. Stir the garlic paste into the jar along with a few grinds of pepper. Add the oil, cover, and shake to emulsify.





## Panzanella

15 MINUTES ACTIVE, 30 MINUTES TOTAL • serves 4

**LIKE MANY OF MY SUMMER FAVORITES**, this is a simple, adaptable dish that lets good ingredients do the heavy lifting—and it can be made with just about anything you have on hand. The bread is key; a bakery loaf with a dense crust is perfect (even better if it’s a day old). Also key: let the dish sit before serving to give the flavors time to mingle. If you’re looking for something with a little more heft, torn prosciutto or thinly sliced salami are great additions. (If there’s any grilled chicken left, toss it in.)

- 1 loaf ciabatta, cut into ½-inch slices
- 4 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- Salt, to taste
- 4 ounces fresh mozzarella, cut into ½-inch cubes
- 1 medium tomato, cut into ½-inch cubes
- 3 tablespoons chopped **PICKLED RED ONIONS** (pg. 270)
- ½ cup chopped **GRILLED RED BELL PEPPERS**
- Chicken, salami, or prosciutto (optional)
- 1 to 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 to 2 cups arugula
- ¼ cup torn basil leaves
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley leaves

- 1 Toast the bread.** Heat the oven to 400°F. Toss the sliced bread with 1 tablespoon oil and sprinkle with salt. Toast until bread starts to darken at the edges, about 5 minutes.
- 2 Assemble the salad.** While the bread is toasting, mix together the mozzarella, tomato, pickled red onions, and peppers in a large serving bowl. Add chicken, salami, or prosciutto if using. Toss with 2 tablespoons of the oil and the vinegar. Sprinkle with salt and a couple of grinds of pepper.
- 3 Add the bread.** When the bread is cool enough to handle, pull it apart into bite-size pieces and add to the salad bowl. Toss to combine and let sit for about 20 minutes.
- 4 Finish.** Add the arugula, basil, parsley, and remaining oil and toss to combine. Season to taste with salt and vinegar and serve.

## Summer Rolls

30 TO 40 MINUTES TOTAL • serves 4

**THERE’S NO SHORTAGE OF INGREDIENTS** you can put in these summer rolls—carrots, cucumbers, shredded chicken, bean sprouts, enoki mushrooms, or cilantro, just to name a few. Like nori rolls or tacos, this is fun to do with kids because they can choose their fillings and enjoy making a mess (a tasty one though). The volumes for the ingredients below are approximate; the main rule of thumb is not to overstuff the rolls. To get ahead, I’ll often blanch the noodles and shrimp earlier in the week.

And since we all know how much kids love to dip their food, whisk together a couple of new dipping sauces. Maybe they’ll become your household’s new ketchup. I also love to make the peanut sauce (pg. 47) for this meal, but I’m still working on having my kids accept it. It’s a process.

### RICE WINE DIPPING SAUCE

- ¼ cup soy sauce
- ¼ cup rice wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1 garlic clove, peeled and minced
- 2 scallions, green parts only, chopped
- Pinch of brown sugar

### SUMMER ROLLS

- 6 ounces **RICE NOODLES**, cooked
- 12 rice paper wrappers
- 24 **COOKED SHRIMP**, cut in half lengthwise if large
- 12 bibb lettuce leaves
- 1 cup shredded napa cabbage
- 1 medium red bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 1 cup mint leaves
- 1 cup basil leaves

- 1 Make the dipping sauce(s).** Whisk all ingredients together in a small bowl and set aside.
- 2 Make the rolls.** Cook the rice noodles according to package directions, drain, and rinse with cool water. Set aside. Have all of the fillings prepped and ready to go. Fill a large bowl with warm water. Submerge a wrapper into the water to soften it (this takes about 10 seconds). Carefully pull it out and lay flat on a clean, damp tea towel (it’s important that the towel is damp, otherwise the wrapper will stick).  
  
Arrange 3 to 4 shrimp or shrimp halves in a horizontal row about two-thirds down the wrapper. Place lettuce over the shrimp, followed by a small handful of rice noodles, then a few pieces of cabbage and peppers. Add mint and basil, 2 to 3 leaves of each. Fold the sides of the wrapper in toward the center. Then, starting with the end closest to you, roll it over the filling until you reach the other end. Repeat with remaining wrappers.
- 3 Serve** with dipping sauce(s).



## GIRL MEETS GRILL

**FOR YEARS, GALEN TOOK THE LEAD ON EVERYTHING GRILL-RELATED** until one summer evening when he was running late and it was too hot to turn on the oven for whatever we had planned. So I took matters into my own hands, and that night, it took me thirty minutes and practically an entire book of matches to get the thing going. I proceeded to burn the daylights out of some chicken thighs and ended up feeding the kids peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

I tried again the next night, this time with pizza. Equally humbling. But by day three, I'd taken my neighbor's advice to use a chimney and a long-handled lighter to start the fire, removing a huge barrier to maintaining good morale and having success on the grill.

Grilling, especially over charcoal or wood, is a little unpredictable. Even though I'm usually the one to start the fire and cook the food nowadays, it still feels like practice. And practicing is the only way you'll really get the hang of it. Here are a few things I've learned (about grilling in general and over charcoal or wood specifically):

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**Make two zones.** Whether you're grilling over gas or coals, having the heat concentrated on one side lets you sear things over high heat, then finish cooking in the ambient heat. And if your fire flares up, having a cool zone gives you a place to move the food where it won't scorch. When I first started grilling, I'd make a fire in the center, and it was harder to manage the heat. Shunting coals to the side gives you more flexibility to cook things evenly.

**Use all of the heat.** Let's say you're grilling steak and vegetables. Start with the meat on the hot side, and when you move it to the cooler side, add the vegetables to the spot where the steak was. As the grill cools a bit, you can move the vegetables to the side. Your meal might be cooked, but there's plenty of heat left on the grill. Are there other vegetables in the house that could stand to be cooked? Throw them on the grill and use them in a different dish later in the week. Or grill some fruit, like pineapple or peaches, for a simple dessert.

**Move it around.** This might be the most fun part of grilling. You really have to watch and respond to what the food needs in terms of heat. If I have a bunch of chicken pieces on the grill, I turn them constantly, switching their placement around depending on how much char the pieces have, which ones need to slow down, and which ones need to speed up. On the grill you can't really set it and forget it (unless you're smoking, but that's another story).

**Use a skillet.** Once I discovered I could put a skillet on the grill, I never looked back. Almost anything you cook on the stove can be transferred to a skillet on the grill, so you can spend more time outside and keep the kitchen nice and cool.







**LEIGH BELANGER** is a food writer, editor, and recipe developer who has been enthusiastically cooking since she was a teenager. She studied gastronomy at Boston University and is the author of the *Boston Homegrown Cookbook*. Her writing and recipes have been featured in *Culture* magazine (where she was the food editor), the *Boston Globe*, *Edible Boston*, and other publications. She is the founder of Salt & Lemons, a kitchen coaching service designed to inspire and teach people to cook more at home. She lives and cooks in Boston with her husband and two boys.

Find Leigh's recipes and writing at [saltandlemons.net](http://saltandlemons.net).



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Cooking

**FACED WITH THE NEVER-SIMPLE TASK** of feeding her busy family every night, food writer Leigh Belanger turned to her kitchen chalkboard, planning out her weekly dinner menus in order to keep the chaos at bay. She quickly discovered the merits of modern menu planning: it saves time and money, produces better meals, cuts down on waste, and returns creativity to the kitchen. Most importantly, she found that a good plan preserves sanity.

This stunning and approachable cookbook is an invaluable guide for families who want to eat locally and in season but know that getting dinner on the table requires a dash of reality. Sixteen seasonal menus lay out the strategy, starting with a “big cook” and clever tips on how to use that food in new and inventive dishes throughout the week. With over one hundred delicious and inspiring ideas for family meals, *My Kitchen Chalkboard* provides the wit, wisdom, and adaptable recipes you need to answer that nightly question: “What’s for dinner?”



**Every family should own this cookbook.**

Leigh’s flavor-forward, seasonally inspired recipes are fun and easy to read, filled with tips to make your home cooking and menu planning skills soar. The conviviality of food is ever-present—and isn’t that the point? Food should bring us together. *My Kitchen Chalkboard* does just that!

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**JENNIFER PERILLO**, *Homemade with  
Love: Simple Scratch Cooking from In  
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With tips for prepping ahead, doubling recipes, and stretching meals, *My Kitchen Chalkboard* is an invaluable resource for the busy parent looking to keep the dinner offerings fresh and fun without too much fuss.

**ALEXANDRA STAFFORD**, *Bread Toast Crumbs*

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