

Nourish Yourself Week 7: Rethinking “Meal Prep”

We’ve talked about the importance of having a stocked pantry to anchor your go-to meals and have covered a few strategies to help you master grocery shopping in a way that works for your lifestyle. Now that we’ve got a full pantry and fridge, now what? This week, we’ll consider a different way to approach the concept of “meal prepping” to maximize options and efficiency and minimize boredom in the kitchen. If you have a meal prep strategy that works for you, share it in the Discord! –Christina

Sneak More Meal Prep Into Your Day

Try to sneak meal prep into your daily activities the way you might squeeze some more natural movement into your day (like walking instead of driving or taking the stairs instead of the elevator). When meal prep becomes an additive task instead of something you have to separately make time for, it ends up feeling more manageable (and, therefore, more doable).

Some ideas for how to tack meal prep onto everyday activities:

- Wash, tear, and bag leafy greens and/or herbs when you’re unloading groceries from the store
- Peel some garlic or ginger while watching TV and store in a small sealed container in the fridge for up to two weeks
- Batch up your knifework: If you’re halving Brussels sprouts to roast for dinner tonight, thinly slice a few extra to make into a quick slaw tomorrow
- If you’re dicing and/or sautéing an onion for tonight’s dinner, dice and/or sauté some more for another meal later in the week. Diced uncooked onions will last in the fridge for up to a week; cooked onions will last 3-5 days. Either will give you a significant headstart on your next meal
- If you’re already boiling a pot of water for pasta, hardboiling eggs, etc., use the water to blanch leafy greens such as Swiss chard, kale, mature spinach, collard greens, mustard greens, and/or broccoli rabe. Once blanched, the greens can be chopped and squeezed of excess water, then formed into little balls and frozen for up to two months (follow the method detailed [here](#)). Add greens directly from the freezer to a soup, stir-fry, quesadillas, lasagna, pastas, fried rice—the possibilities are endless!
- Similarly, if you already have the oven on to make dinner, throw a tray of vegetables (cut carrots, broccoli florets, sweet potato chunks, etc.) tossed with olive oil, salt, and pepper on another rack in the oven to have on hand for another meal later in the week
- If you’re cooking grains such as farro, quinoa, millet, rice, etc., consider cooking more than you need. I’m a huge fan of [cooking any whole grain the way I cook pasta](#), i.e. in a large pot of boiling well-salted water. Spread out the drained, cooked grains on a baking sheet in a single layer and let them cool at room temperature. Once the grains have cooled, place the baking sheet in the freezer for a couple of hours, then portion out grains into containers or resealable bags. Add the cooked frozen grains straight from the freezer into a soup or stir-fry, or thaw overnight in the fridge to use in a grain bowl.

RECIPE: Oven-Caramelized Onions

Caramelized onions have a deeply umami, savory quality that amplifies the flavor of omelets and frittatas, soup bases, braises or stews, and pasta and grain dishes. While stovetop caramelizing can require a chunk of time and a watchful eye, oven-caramelized onions are much more forgiving, and are a perfect thing to slip in the oven when you've already got it turned on.

Ingredients

2 lbs. any onions (yellow, white, red), thinly sliced
2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt

Preparation

Preheat the oven to 400°. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper for easy cleanup. Add onions to baking sheet and toss with oil, 2 Tbsp. water, and salt. Roast until golden-brown, stirring every 10 minutes or so, for 40–50 minutes. Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to five days, or freeze for up to three months.

RECIPE: Kimchi Fried Grains With A Fried Egg

2 servings

This recipe represents, in my opinion, the best of what do-ahead meal prep has to offer. It makes use of freezer grains *and* freezer greens, which means if you have eggs and a jar of kimchi in the fridge and some pantry goods like soy sauce and toasted sesame oil, this becomes a nutritious pantry meal that comes together quickly. If using grains and greens directly from the freezer, add an extra minute or two to the cook time. For an extra-fancy version, cook a little chopped bacon or pancetta in the leftover egg oil before adding the scallion whites and kimchi.

Ingredients

2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
2 large eggs
Kosher salt
2 scallions, thinly sliced, whites and greens separated
½ cup kimchi, coarsely chopped
Big handful of leafy greens (such as Swiss chard, kale, collard greens, spinach), directly from the freezer if using frozen
2 cups cooked grains (such as farro, spelt, quinoa, barley, white or brown rice), directly from the freezer if using frozen
2 tsp. soy sauce
1 tsp. toasted sesame oil
Toasted sesame seeds (optional)

Preparation

Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high. Crack eggs into pan and season with salt. Cook until whites are set near the yolks and browned and crisp around the edges, about 4 minutes. Transfer eggs to a plate.

Return skillet with oil to medium heat. Add scallion whites and kimchi and cook until softened, stirring occasionally, about 3 minutes. Add leafy greens and continue to cook another 3 minutes. Add grains, soy sauce, and sesame oil and cook, stirring, until grains are heated through, about 2 minutes; taste and season with salt.

Divide grains between plates and top each with a fried egg, reserved scallion greens, and toasted sesame seeds if using.

Week 7 homework: Pick one task from the list of meal prep ideas above and see how you can incorporate it into your current routine in the kitchen. Does it work with your current routine? If not, why not? What needs to change in order for you to make that space? Come to the Discord with observations and thoughts on your experience with meal prep.