

## 287 - How I'm Making Dinner Easier for the Rest of the Year

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't! Today is episode 287 - how I'm making dinner easier for the rest of the year. It's early November, and we're about to hit the gauntlet if we're not already in it. Dinner is one of those things that just keeps happening no matter who you are and how you live, so today I'm going to share what I'm personally doing to make dinner easier from now until after the holidays are over, and hopefully it'll give you some ideas on how to make yours easier, too.

The first way I'm making dinner easier is by paying attention to my expectations. This isn't as much of a struggle for me as it used to be, but I have to tell myself whenever I get squirrely that repetition is okay. Chicken four or five days a week is okay. Spaghetti once a week is okay. Not making anything new for an entire season is okay. I don't need that permission as much as I used to, but that is a huge part of dinner feeling easier. You can repeat stuff. You can really do anything that helps your life if it matters to you! We often feel guilty for lots of choices around dinner, and I'm here to tell you that you don't need to hold guilt as well as dinner.

The second way I'm making dinner easier is by limiting my choices. Choosing from every recipe we have ever encountered is a sure road to feeling overwhelmed, so allow me to remind you of the beauty of the dinner queue! A dinner queue is a curated list of recipes that work for your season of life right now as well as the season in nature. For us in North Carolina, it's fall and getting cooler, so we get to eat chili and soup more! I think cold weather foods feel a lot easier for a majority of people, so it's nice to narrow down the list of what you might cook for dinner for the rest of the year. Most of my dinner queues have around 30 meals in them, and they haven't really changed much over the years. We'll put a link to past fall/winter dinner queues in the show notes, but really just choose what works for you whether it's 3 or 30.

The third way I'm making dinner easier is by planning meals for the rest of the year. I know that sounds insane, but hear me out. It's already the second week of November, so there are only a handful of weeks left in the year. What I like about monthly or longterm meal planning is how helpful it is during busy seasons, and November and December are for sure busy. But here's the key, and this is laid out in detail in *The Lazy Genius Kitchen*, by the way. That's a book I wrote about making your kitchen and everything that happens in it work for you. The key with longterm meal planning is to not plan chronologically. That is the absolute most important element of this. If you just go from day to day to day, you will lose your mind because there's nothing to orient you. You don't really know what kinds of decisions to make because you're not taking your calendar into account.

So here's what you do. You plan meals or just mark off days where you know you'll be doing holiday things. Office parties, family gatherings, dinner out or a favorite meal in for birthdays, that kind of thing. Then do the same for days that are super busy. Look at your calendar and

notice where you really could use an easy dinner, whether it's takeout or a brainless crowdpleaser, aka a meal that it is mindless for the cook to make and relatively pleasing to whatever crowd is eating it. Put easy dinners on hard days. Then you can use a Meal Matrix if you have one to fill in the rest using meals from your dinner queue! A meal matrix is a structure of when you eat certain meals. Taco Tuesday, Pizza Friday, or Planning Pairs like you always make Change Your Life Chicken on one day and then use the leftover vegetables as the base for soup the next night. Give yourself some structure on when you eat certain things. And then you really can plan for a long time at one time. It's pretty rad. It's not necessary, but for me it makes things easier.

I haven't actually done this yet for November and December. To be honest with you, it's a little weird to meal plan publicly when so much of what goes into meal planning is what a person does individually in their own lives, when they're out of town or who they're celebrating or whatever. So it feels really personal if I'm honest to go through that process on Instagram or something because there's a lot of personal stuff that exists in a meal plan! So I'm trying to find a way to do that where it's helpful but still feels like I'm honoring my and my family's boundaries. So we'll see what happens there. But this is something I do in a lot of really busy seasons, and it's the best.

### **We'll be right back...**

The fourth thing I'm doing to make dinner easier for the rest of year is limiting my new recipes but choosing ones that I am super pumped to make. One that I cannot wait to make that I think my kids will actually eat is the Instant Pot wild rice soup from Pinch of Yum. I saw it on Instagram a couple of weeks ago, and my mouth was agape. It looked so yummy and something that wouldn't cause a lot of complaining or resistance from my tiny humans. Actually they're not so tiny anymore. Sam is taller than I am now, but you know what I mean.

This is an important part of meal planning, no matter how often you do it, that doesn't get talked about a lot. There are so many new recipes out there, and you might feel various kinds of pressure to cook certain ones for a variety of reasons. But the most excited we'll ever be to cook a new recipe is when we discover it. Let me say that again. The most excited we'll ever be to cook a new recipe is when we discover it. So if you're not experiencing some kind of emotional allegiance or party in your head when you find something new, you'll likely not have enough umph in your season to cook the thing once you come to it in the plan. So if integrating new recipes into your life is a bit of a challenge, only choose a recipe or two (don't go crazy) that you just cannot wait to make. I think that does more for your meal planning and dinner success than having a huge line of recipes waiting in the wings that you never ever get to.

The fifth thing I'm doing to make dinner easier is having regular grocery pickup days. I do grocery pickup every week, but it's on different days depending on when we have enough that we need. But recently I've been scheduling them on the same two days a week, that way I'm never more than three days away from getting what I need. That one is short, but it's really helped me have what I need when I need it without thinking too hard.

And the sixth and final thing I'm doing to make dinner easier is asking for help. I ask for help from my kids and ask them what they want to eat. Annie always says breakfast, Sam always says spaghetti, and Ben always laments that Annie and Sam have chosen the same things again. But it still helps. I also ask for help from my husband when I need him to lighten the dinner load. Now frankly, I like cooking. I'm better at it than he is, faster at it which in some cases is good, and it's my job in our division of labor. We have a really even split in things, and meals fall to me with the exception of cleaning up. He almost always does that. But there are days where I've planned something and just don't have the energy to make it or make it to completion. So there are days when I'll text him before he's left work and say "What's your margin like? I'm feeling beat and would enjoy a nap or a walk before dinner if you don't mind finishing it. But if you don't have the margin for that either, I'll just take some time after dinner." And he will answer honestly right back. If he can, great. If he can't, also great. Sometimes we have to do things we don't want to do, but that doesn't mean we have to resent the situation or the person who can't help us with it in that moment. But I do at least ask, and I'm glad I do even if the answer isn't always what I'd like.

So to recap, I'm making dinner easier for the rest of the year by giving myself permission to repeat meals, limiting my choices with a dinner queue, planning the rest of the year at once by using a meal matrix and going in the right order, only choosing new recipes I am pumped to try, scheduling regular grocery pickup twice a week, and asking for help. I hope this helps gives you some ideas on how dinner for the rest of the year can be easier for you, too.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week, it's Bonnie Nordvall. Bonnie sent me this: "Hi Kendra! Love your stuff! Your podcast is in my ear while I toil at a monotonous manufacturing job, and your practical ideas are much appreciated and often implemented. I recently discovered a way to Lazy Genius my return home from a household supply shopping trip. I realized that packaging drives me crazy. All the tags and boxes and random bits of cardboard! I dumped all my loot onto the table and immediately freed everything from its packaging, collected an entire shopping bag of debris, then swiftly put everything away. I guess this was an example of batching. Instead of wearily unpacking each item as I needed it over the next few weeks, complaining every time, it was all done and my new supplies were ready to go. Thanks for the inspiration!"

I love this, Bonnie! Yes, Bonnie did batch her unpacking. But I think the Lazy Genius principle that stands out the most here is the principle of going in the right order. Go in the right order. There are practical right orders for things in my opinion - making soup, cleaning the bathroom, cleaning the kitchen - but if you've read *The Lazy Genius Way*, you already know that the right order for most things is to name what matters, calm the crazy, and then trust yourself with what comes next. Bonnie did that! Bonnie named what matters - having what she needs easily without complaining. Then she calmed the crazy by getting rid of the packaging of her items! That third piece of trusting yourself is evident here too because sometimes when we come up with a solution like this, we think it's silly or too small or too something. Do I really need to stand here and open up all of my things and take off the plastic and cardboard? Bonnie said yes, and

it made Bonnie's life better and easier and less complain-y. And remember this is the goal! We are making incremental changes every single day and trusting that those choices are good for us even if they might not work for someone else. So this is so great practically but also theoretically. Thank you for sharing this with me, Bonnie, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

That's it for today, y'all! Be sure you're subscribed to this podcast and not just listening to an episode because this Thursday, we have a bonus episode on holiday decorating with the one and only Myquillyn Smith, aka The Nester. It's a short and sweet conversation about how to decorate for the season and the holidays without losing your mind, and you're going to love it. So subscribe to this podcast so the episode will automatically be in your podcast app when you're ready to listen! And thanks so much for listening today. I'm so glad you're here. Until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and The Nester and I will see you Thursday!